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*The Mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi*







CYPRESSES, AND THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO, ASSISI  
*frontispiece*



*The Mysticism of  
St. Francis of Assisi*

*by D. H. S. Nicholson, illustrated  
with reproductions of etchings  
by Laurenzio Laurenzi*



THE MYSTICISM OF  
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

BY D. H. S. NICHOLSON, ILLUSTRATED  
WITH REPRODUCTIONS OF ETCHINGS

BY LAURENZIO LAURENZI

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## *Preface*

**T**HE STATE OF FRANCISCAN LITERATURE at the present day is such as to cause some hesitation in the mind of any lover of St. Francis who may feel moved to add to its already enormous bulk. Both the saint himself and the far-reaching movement to which he gave rise have been treated from so many and so different standpoints, and with so vast an expenditure of erudition and enthusiasm, that at first sight the field of research would seem to have been exhausted. And so far as actual biography—the consideration of the events of St. Francis' life and the general character that they evidence—is concerned, it is clear that the three great biographies of M. Sabatier, M. Joergensen, and Father Cuthbert have left unnoticed nothing of importance to our understanding of St. Francis and his times. They are authoritative in the best sense, in that they combine a sympathy for the personality of their subject with a precise and profound knowledge of the yet discovered facts concerning him. To have attempted another biography, therefore, would have been both impertinent and superfluous, and in preparing this study of St. Francis' mysticism I have not attempted to cover again the well-explored ground.

This being so, it may be well to prepare the reader for what I have attempted to do. It has long seemed to me that the literature which concerns St. Francis has been deficient in one respect, and that a respect which touches most deeply the reality of any presentation of him and therefore its value for the present day. At the side of the



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detailed biographies there have been offered to the reading public studies which show him from a countless number of standpoints: he has been considered as an impassioned and far-sighted social reformer, as a great statesman, as an obedient son of the Church, as a semi-rebel whose mission was to reform its more salient abuses, as a tender-hearted lover of animals and of all things that live, as an inspired poet, as a man deeply imbued with the knightly tradition, as a rather weak-minded if amiable enthusiast who did no great harm but certainly no great good, as a fanatic, as a mentally deranged neurasthenic; but, except for passing references, I have not been able to discover that he has been treated as a mystic. And yet, if mysticism stand for the most real aspect of the individual, if it represent the relation between him and the Absolute, it is in this supremely that lies the key to his character and so to his actions. It will provide the clue to the main direction of his life as well as to its details, if it be once conceded that mysticism was a real and living force for him.

It is in the belief that this was eminently the case with St. Francis that I have, with much diffidence, approached the subject. For those who are unable to believe that mysticism is a vital and fundamental thing, I shall seem to have added but one more to the many one-sided and partial studies of St. Francis: to those for whom mysticism is, or is becoming, an indispensable part of life I would offer this consideration of one of the greatest of those who have realized that all things are within. For one of the peculiarities of man's search for God is that though the details of its method may vary, its essentials remain unchanged throughout the centuries. The principles which guided St. Francis are as true for us now and as applicable to our needs as they were for him, and it is his amazing success in the sempiternal quest which constitutes his chief claim to value in the present. He has always been—

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perhaps vaguely at times—an inspiration: he may also be a guide.

It is with this intention of illustrating the principles upon which St. Francis moulded his life that I have chosen from among the incidents recorded in the old biographies. I have not attempted to mention them all, feeling that a small number which were suggestive of a certain principle would bring that principle into greater relief than a larger number which might obscure it. I have, in a word, tried to make a consistent analysis rather than a romantic or a beautiful picture. And in this connection I would add that I have confined myself to a consideration of St. Francis' mysticism as it applied to the whole of his life, as it was a part and parcel of the entire man and a guiding principle, and have quite left aside for the moment any consideration of the details of his inner life taken as a progression. Such a study would be of intense interest, and would demand a treatment of St. Francis' spiritual progress according to the classifications of Mystical Theology, with an attempt to show how and at what times he reached the stages acknowledged by that science, and the effect which such progress had on his life. It would aim at a determination of the final point which he reached, and would necessitate a consideration of the implications of such mystical phenomena as the Stigmata as are recorded of him. There is, I think, ample material for such a study.

In respect of the chapters devoted to mysticism in general, I have intended them as a tentative delimitation of the ground. Both the word and the ideas of mysticism have received so many and so varying interpretations, especially during the last few years, that it seemed necessary to provide some general working hypothesis before proceeding to consider the mysticism of a particular individual. I have therefore done this in alternate chapters, taking one subdivision of the subject in each case and then endeavour-

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ing to find illustrations in the case of St. Francis. I have tried, as far as possible, to base such a hypothesis on the records left by accredited mystics, and have so been forced to use, in more cases than I could have wished, the unsatisfactory because unconvincing method of quotation. I can hardly hope to have avoided statements and points of view which differ, sometimes radically, from others for which a no less clear authority can be found among mystical writers, but my hope and intention has been to state the case in a way which is consistent with the main doctrines of Christian mysticism.

With this I will leave the reader to the consideration of the subject itself, adding only the wish with which St. Francis greeted those whom he met on his journeys through the world: *Il Signore vi dia pace.*

D. H. S. NICHOLSON.

1923.



## Chapter One

**A**MONG THE MANY POINTS WHICH are common to the literature of mysticism, there is none which recurs with greater regularity, or stands out with greater clearness, than that which inculcates the necessity of the annihilation of the self. It is not a doctrine which is confined to any one school of thought, nor is it dependent on any particular creed: the differences of theology, however fundamental they may be, which are as the signs of division between one church and another, do not affect the unanimity with which it has been insisted upon as a *sine qua non* to spiritual life of any real or vital kind. In a word, the necessity for the annihilation of the self as precedent to that knowledge of God which is the sole end and aim of all mysticism is a fundamental characteristic of mystical teaching.

Since, then, this necessity is common to the East and the West, to Christendom and Islam, to the most ancient mysteries as to the latest schools of the present century which have any claim to be regarded as schools of spiritual instruction, it is peculiarly vital that its meaning should be beyond question. But to the consternation of those who attempt to gain a hurried comprehension of the ideas underlying the mystical position, there is found another doctrine no less widespread and no less fundamental which appears to stand in direct opposition to that of self-annihilation. The command "Know thyself" brings with it the hallowing of many centuries and the implication that in such knowledge is to be found a treasure of eternal worth. If the self be that which is at all costs to be destroyed, if,

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as has been said, self love be the nest of sin,<sup>1</sup> how can such teaching be reconciled with the recommendation that self knowledge is supremely to be desired? Is the self to be sought and discovered only that it may eventually be destroyed, is the command to be interpreted as meaning "Know thyself in order to annihilate thyself," or is some resolution of the apparent antithesis possible?

"It belongeth properly to us," says one who is among the clearest lights of mysticism, "both by nature and by grace, to long and desire with all our mights to know our Self in fulness of endless joy."<sup>2</sup> This answer is in itself enough to show that destruction is not the purpose of the search, but that from one point of view it is in the very knowledge of the self that all felicity consists.

It is plain that an apparent contradiction exists, and if a reconciliation is to be found it must evidently be sought in the meanings attributed to the word which is the cause of the disagreement. What, then, is the idea of the self underlying the writings of the mystics?

It is clear, in the first place, that they must either have used the word in widely different senses or have regarded man as having within him two selves which they conceived respectively as higher and lower, as true and false, as desirable and detestable. With regard to the supposition that the word was employed to designate completely different ideas, so that one writer would regard it as synonymous with all that is evil while another would conceive it to be the *Ultima Thule* of all desire, it is inherently improbable that such an inconsistency should have arisen. Throughout all their history the mystics have been trying to say but one thing, and though their symbols and their language have differed vastly they have all, within certain wide limits, been concerned with one process, and that a

<sup>1</sup> Lopukhin, *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church*, chap. iv (3).

<sup>2</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xlv.



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process in which the data have been unchanging. The employment of so vital a term for two purposes diametrically opposed would suggest a gratuitous obscuration from which mysticism must be absolved even by its most confirmed antagonists, since it would stultify the purpose of all mystical texts by rendering any consistent interpretation of them impossible. And inasmuch as the mystics have ever, in their writings, been endeavouring to throw some light on the essential process of their lives so that others might see and understand more clearly for themselves, it is difficult to credit them with a proceeding which would make such writings not only useless, but misleading.

The alternative supposition is that the mystics have regarded man, for purposes and in a sense that will appear more clearly later on, as having two selves.

In what sense, then, is the self to be taken, and to what reality in man does it correspond? When modern psychology considers the self as a whole it begins by discriminating between two aspects of it, which are respectively the self as knower and the self as known. The self as known, or the empirical *ego*, is the idea which a man has of himself and presents as a concept to the self as knower. This presentation of my self (as known) to my self (as knower) is evidently not a fixed quantity. My own view of my self to-day may be as different from my view of my self yesterday as light from darkness: whereas yesterday I may have regarded myself as incompetent and foredoomed to failure in anything I attempted, to-day I may consider myself as eminently fitted for the work in hand and assured of success therein. Further, my view of myself differs according to my pretensions; if I desire to be a world-renowned athlete and am, as a matter of fact, incapable of walking a mile under half an hour, I shall undoubtedly have a very low and depressed view of my own capacities: whereas on the other hand, if the athletic ideal

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does not attract me at all, I may be physically no more efficient and yet have a view of myself, on other grounds and with reference to other pretensions, of a completely different character. There is, then, between these empirical egos or views of myself a certain conflict, and a resulting necessity of choice. I cannot, for example, be both an athletic champion and a gourmand; it is improbable that I can be both a Don Juan and a saint; and yet all these are possible ideals which I could put before me before attempting to attain to any of them. But to attain to one, the other must be forsaken—I am compelled to make a choice and, if I am to reach the end I have put before me, to adhere resolutely to the course I have chosen and resist all inclinations to swerve in the direction of any of the other once possible ideals.<sup>1</sup>

Man has, then, a whole array of possible selves, or views of his self as one thing or another, from which it is imperative that he make a choice: "the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation."<sup>2</sup> But who or what is it that makes the choice? The answer, it would seem, can only be the self as knower. But what is the self as knower? Here psychologists are less certain of their ground. Their general conclusion (though such conclusions are ever subject to revision as knowledge increases) would seem to be:

1. That the self as knower is not an unchanging and stationary element in the constitution of man, but rather a part of his consciousness which is in a state of perpetual flux and change. It is a continuous succession of states, each of which is different from that of the last moment but appropriates both it and all that it contained. In such

<sup>1</sup> See W. James, *Textbook of Psychology*, pp. 183, 186.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

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appropriation and in the fact that the states of consciousness of one moment have a functional identity with those of the moment before (inasmuch as they know the same objects and react upon them in an identical way, whether those objects be entirely foreign or empirical egos) is found an adequate explanation of the sense of personal identity which every individual possesses.

2. That the empirical egos already mentioned vary directly as the self (as knower) varies, since they are part and parcel of the one mass of consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Among the objects presented to this ever-changing stream of consciousness there is one category with which it feels a closer affinity than with all the rest: the category, that is, comprising the repertory of selves or empirical egos from which it is called upon to make a choice. It has been seen that this repertory constitutes the potentialities of which man is capable, and the crisis for him lies always in the choice that he makes. It is a question of the selection of those ideals towards which his energies shall be directed, and with which he shall identify himself, and they range from the highest to the lowest—from the most universal to the smallest and the most circumscribed.

It must constantly be borne in mind, however, that the attribution to a man of many possible selves is at most arbitrary and provisional, since they represent nothing more clearly demarcated than the different ways of being of which he is capable, and a considerable danger attaches to any view in which the different selves are regarded as fixed or ascertained. But just because the selves represent such fluid and unseizable things as ways of being, it is a matter of considerable convenience to strike them, as it were, into momentary immobility in order that a clearer compre-

<sup>1</sup> W. James, *Textbook of Psychology*, pp. 200 *et seq.* See H. R. Marshall, *Consciousness*, chaps. i, iii, v, xxiii-xxvi.

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hension may be gained. It is a method sanctioned by most of the sciences, though it be abused by the majority of them before the end. It is easier, for example, to get a grip of a country's history by dividing up the moving panorama of events into clear and well defined periods, so that the historian comes to speak of a Victorian age and a Georgian age, than by regarding them as an unbroken flow; but the error of imagining that there is any clear line of demarcation between one such age and another is generally avoided. So with the various ways of being of which a man is capable: they may be divided up into any number of so-called selves as long as the inclination to imagine them as marked off with definite boundaries and frontiers, the one from the other, is successfully resisted.

This conception of a choice from among a number of possible selves would seem to throw some light on the question which was asked at the outset, as to the idea of the self underlying the writings of the mystics. The two doctrines—of the necessity for annihilating the self on the one hand and of its high sanctity on the other—which appeared at first sight to be in hopeless contradiction, are seen to be so no longer if they be taken as referring to two aspects of one general subject.

It is not suggested that any very clear or any common psychological scheme was present in the minds of the mystics when they wrote, yet as a whole they would certainly seem to have been conscious of the necessity for a choice from among the hierarchy of the selves or ways of being, and to have begun by making a large general division between all the possibilities. Instead of regarding each conceivable self separately, they grouped them into two different categories between which all the possibilities were divided. They dichotomized, that is, all the possible ways of being and considered each section as the antithesis of the other, and the two were, in respect of each other, pre-

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eminently higher and lower. It may serve the present purpose to take some such conception as has been suggested and to test it by applying to it some of the statements of the mystics themselves.

But before doing so it remains to be discovered what principles in man were held, consciously or unconsciously, by the mystics to correspond to the various parts: the higher and lower selves and that which directs its energies to either of them.

The language which has been used to refer to the constitution of man has naturally differed largely according to time and place, but it seems that one of the oldest and most general sets of terms will correspond very generally with the position that has been outlined. In the language of body, soul, and spirit, the term spirit, as being the highest principle in man and that which is ardently to be desired, corresponds very closely to the idea of the higher self. For such of the mystics as clothed their desire and their experience in a Christian dress, it was, without any doubt or uncertainty, Christ.<sup>1</sup> The lower self is represented by the term body, but it is evident that in such a connection the word is taken in a very wide sense. Obviously it will stand for very much more than the actual physical vehicle; it must include, for example, the sensations which are received by means of the physical senses, the desires which are more particularly those of the body, and in fact all desires and emotions which, while they are not strictly physical, cannot be regarded as specifically spiritual. Such a division is admittedly arbitrary, as are indeed all divisions of man and his selves, and raises the wide question of what is to be attributed to the higher and lower selves respectively. For the moment it must suffice to say that the hall-

<sup>1</sup> See chap. xv, where the implications of this supposition are discussed.



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mark of all that was attributed to the lower self was limitation and, as a result thereof, separateness.<sup>1</sup>

With spirit and body representing the higher and lower aspects of the self, the term soul remains to be used for that which directs its energies to either of them; for the I, the self as knower. According to the psychologists, it will be remembered, the self as knower is an elusive, ever-changing thing; it will vary with every variation of the objects presented to it and therefore with every variation of the different selves, inasmuch as they are presented to it as objects, no less than of things more obviously foreign to it. It will be a state of consciousness, for which there must be something of which it may be conscious: a state which by the definition it is not possible to imagine apart from consciousness. The question of primary importance for each man is to decide in what direction these states of consciousness are to be directed.

Leaving aside for the moment that whole class of presentations or things of which the I is conscious, which fall under the general head of being foreign to it, and considering only the presentations of the possible selves which are made to the I, it is not difficult to see what was the inevitable answer of the mystics to this question of the proper direction of the states of consciousness. They replied in effect that the business of man was to seek out his higher self, and that to do this he was to annihilate his lower self, the supposition being that he might follow after either of these things but not both entirely. It is the impossibility of serving both God and Mammon, with any prospect of success along either line.

It will also be remembered that from the psychological point of view both the empirical egos or selves, and the I which directs its energies to the higher or lower categories thereof, are equally parts of the one consciousness. They

<sup>1</sup> See further, chap. ix.

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vary directly as each other, and it follows that if the selves which are known generically as the higher self be followed, the I itself will change accordingly. It is by the identification of the I with the higher self that the I will be formed according to its pattern; it is a process of gradual moulding of the flowing states of consciousness to a definitely chosen ideal, and, as the process continues, the higher self is made more and more a part and parcel of the states of consciousness which in the last analysis are the I of every man. In fact, when the forces of the I have been so directed to one or other of the selves as to effect a practical identification therewith, the states of consciousness which constitute that I become so tinged with the tendencies of the self that has been selected that it is a matter of considerable difficulty for them to take any other direction.

On turning to the writings of the mystics themselves for the purpose of testing the validity of the views suggested above, such voluminous and repeated references to the annihilation of the self are found that it is only possible to give a few of the more characteristic examples. An unknown writer of the fifteenth century plunges direct into the very heart of the matter in the first few pages of his book. He quotes St. Paul's saying that "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away," and explains that that which is in part, or the creature, cannot know the perfect. He then puts to himself the question: "Since the Perfect cannot be known nor apprehended of any creature, but the soul is a creature, how can it be known by the soul?" and answers that it cannot be known "by the soul *as a creature*. We mean it is impossible to the creature in virtue of its creature-nature and qualities, that by which it saith 'I' and 'myself.' For in whatsoever creature the Perfect shall be known, therein creature-nature, qualities, the I, the Self and the like, must all be lost and done away. . . . So long as we

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think much of these things, cleave to them with love, joy, pleasure or desire, so long remaineth the Perfect unknown to us.”<sup>1</sup> The self which here is to be done away bears the distinguishing mark of the lower self as outlined above—it is “that by which it saith ‘I’ and ‘myself,’” or in other words it is that sense of limitation and separateness by which a man regards himself as set over against or distinguished from the rest of the world. While such a sentiment exists the Perfect is unknown to us—the soul cannot identify itself with the activities of the higher self while such a sense of selfhood remains. “Now mark: when the creature claimeth for its own anything good, such as Substance, Life, Knowledge, Power, and in short whatever we should call good, as if it were that, or possessed that, or that were itself, or that proceeded from it,—as often as this cometh to pass, the creature goeth astray. What did the devil do else. . . . ? This setting up of a claim and his I and Me and Mine, these were his going astray and his fall. And thus it is to this day.”<sup>2</sup> The quality of the lower self of man which gives rise to the necessity for its absolute destruction is then just its selfhood, but the quality of the higher self which makes it the proper aim of all endeavour is precisely its selflessness. The two are therefore mutually exclusive, and for the soul to follow both is an impossibility, or as the *Theologia Germanica* says: “the created soul of man hath also two eyes. The one is the power of seeing into eternity, the other of seeing into time and the creatures . . . but these two eyes of the soul of man cannot both perform their work at once.”<sup>3</sup> It would be difficult to imagine a more precise illustration of the thesis that the soul is as it were poised between the higher and the lower selves, able to identify itself with either of them, but never with both. The same author insists with no less force on the desira-

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. vii.

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bility of knowing the other part of ourselves—the higher or spiritual part. “For, of a truth, thoroughly to know oneself, is above all art, for it is the highest art. If thou knowest thyself well, thou art better and more praiseworthy before God, than if thou didst not know thyself, but didst understand the course of the heavens and of all the planets and stars. . . . For it is said, there came a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Man, know thyself.’ Thus that proverb is still true, ‘Going out were never so good, but staying at home were much better.’” For eternal blessedness consists in one thing only, and that is a goodness which “needeth not to enter into the soul, for it is there already, only it is unperceived.”<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice that in this case the supreme goodness which is synonymous with the higher self is regarded as of one piece with the soul. It is said to be in it, and the soul need only as it were turn the direction of its consciousness to become aware of it. The everlasting search consists not in going out to seek a treasure, but in becoming conscious of what is already within, which is the higher self or the new man. And that is Christ. “When dying and perishing and the like are spoken of, it meaneth that the old man should be destroyed, and not seek its own either in spiritual or in natural things. For where this is brought about in a true divine light, there the new man is born again. In like manner, it hath been said that man should die unto himself, that is, to earthly pleasures, consolations, joys, appetites, the I, the Self, and all that is thereof in man. . . . Whether it be the man himself, or any other creature, whatever it be, it must depart and die, if the man is to be brought aright to another mind, according to the truth. . . . He who liveth in humble obedience and in the new man which is Christ, he is, in

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. ix. Cf. Lady Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xxxix. “Peace and love are ever in us, being and working; but we be not alway in peace and in love.”

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like manner, the brother of Christ and the child of God.”<sup>1</sup>

Turning from the north to the south, from the atmosphere of the Friends of God to that of the Roman Church in one of its periods of strife, we find Molinos, who after all has been said was as true a mystic as any who received the approbation of the official church, bearing witness to the same convictions in not dissimilar language. “Weeping and lamentation are not forbidden to thy Soul; so long as in her higher part she remains resigned.” “Resign and deny thyself wholly: for though true self-denial is harsh at the beginning, it is easy in the middle and becomes most sweet in the end.” Here are the higher self, which, inverting his symbolism, he calls a few pages later “the depth of our Soul” which “is the place of our happiness”; and the lower self from identification with which the soul must be cut off resolutely. It is in the first of these, the depth of our soul, that “the Lord shows us wonders. There we ingulf and lose our selves in the immeasurable sea of His infinite goodness. . . . There doth reside the incomparable fruition of our Soul, and the wonderful and sweet quiet”; and the second of which it is said that “the Lord will not manifest Himself in thy Soul until she be settled in self-abnegation, and dead in her senses and powers.”<sup>2</sup> The two selves are here regarded quite clearly as aspects of the one soul, which must be respectively repressed and encouraged that God may be made manifest in the higher. They are, as has been suggested, ways of being of the soul, and in no way to be regarded as vestures which may be taken and cast aside at will.

It is well to notice at this point that the annihilation and resignation which are desired are not of and from the activities of what has been termed generally the body, as

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, book iii, chaps. v-viii.



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such; but of and from identification of the desires and interests of the soul therewith. As a condemned Quietist it might be expected that Molinos would omit insistence on this vital point, but in the very book which was the cause, or at any rate the ground, of his condemnation, he wrote: "Thou must know that this Annihilation (which is the state in which the soul is capable of Transformation and Union) if it is to be perfect in the Soul, must exist in a man's own Judgment, in his Will, in his Works, Inclinations, Desires, Thoughts and in the very Soul herself: so that the Soul must find herself dead to her Will, Desires, Endeavour, Understanding and Thought; willing, as if she did not will; desiring, as if she did not desire; understanding, as if she did not understand; thinking, as if she did not think. . . ." Such a soul "lives no longer in her self, because God lives in her . . . she is changed, spiritualized, transformed and deified."<sup>1</sup> Here is the full force of the mystic's conviction; the soul, dead to its lower self, pulsates with the life of the higher self which is divine; there is no question of a cessation of external activity, but of an annihilation of the lower self and its concerns as the goal towards which the forces of the soul are to be directed, and the replacing of them by the one goal and purpose of the life of God. So man becomes no longer an isolated unit striving for individual ends, but a channel through which the divine activity pours in a full unbroken stream. "Therefore there must be creatures, and God will have them, to the end that the Will may be put in exercise by their means."<sup>2</sup> "If a man may attain thereunto, to be unto God as his hand is to a man, let him be therewith content, and not seek farther."<sup>3</sup>

But it is in the writings of the Lady Julian, an anchoress of Norwich who lived in the fourteenth century without

<sup>1</sup> Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, book iii, chap. xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. li.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. liv.

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any taint or suspicion of heresy, that the conception of the two selves, the higher of which is divine, is found in perhaps its fullest expression. After speaking of a moment of indecision during which she debated within herself whether or no she should withdraw her attention from the crucifix on which it was concentrated, she says: "Repenting and willing choice be two contraries which I felt both in one at that time. And these be [of our] two parts; the one outward, the other inward. The outward part is our deadly flesh-hood . . . the inward part is an high, blissful life, which is all in peace and in love."<sup>1</sup> She adds that the inward part rules over the outward, and does not concern itself with the will of that outward part: but the inward shall draw the outward, and both shall "be oned in bliss." For in the last analysis all the parts are one; the higher and the lower and that which is capable of being identified with either. They form a trinity in unity. "And as anent our Substance and our Sense part, both together may rightly be called our Soul: and that is because of the oneing that they have in God." "Our nature that is the higher part is knit to God, in the making; and God is knit to our nature that is the lower part, in our flesh-taking: and thus in Christ our two natures are oned. For the Trinity is comprehended in Christ. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Again: "In every soul that shall be saved is a Godly Will that never assented to sin, nor ever shall. Right as there is a beastly will in the lower part that may will no good, right so there is a Godly Will in the higher part, which will is so good that it may never will evil, but ever good. And therefore we are that which He loveth and endlessly we do that which Him pleaseth."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chaps. lvi-lvii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xxxvii. Cf. chap. liii, where Lady Julian again speaks of the Godly will that never assented to sin, and says, "For that same kind [man's nature] that Heaven shall be filled with behoveth needs, of

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In this extract Lady Julian almost personifies the two aspects or ways of being of the soul as the two wills of the two parts of the soul, evidently regarding the soul as able to identify itself with either of them. The two parts are clearly mutually exclusive, inasmuch as one of them is incapable of good as the other is incapable of evil, and it is when the soul identifies herself with the latter that we are considered as doing that which is pleasing to God. There can be no doubt as to her view of the soul's capacity to effect this identification, for a little later she speaks of "our changeable Sense-soul, which seemeth now one [thing], now other,—according as it taketh of the [higher or lower] parts."<sup>1</sup> But as long as we are confined to the life of our sense-soul—so long, that is, as the only communications which our consciousness is capable of receiving are those which come by way of the senses—we cannot know what our Self really is. "And when we verily and clearly see and know what our Self is then shall we verily and clearly see and know our Lord God in fulness of joy. . . . We may have knowing of our Self in this life by continuant help and virtue of our high Nature."<sup>2</sup>

Since it is by the help of our higher self that we shall in the fulness of time come to the knowledge thereof, it is regarded as exercising a continual attraction on the soul, withdrawing it from identification with the lower or bodily part. "For the life and the virtue that we have in the lower part is of the higher, and it cometh down to us from out of the Natural love of the high self, by the working of grace. Atwix the life of the one and the

God's rightfulness, so to have been knit and oned to Him, that therein was kept a Substance which might never, nor should, be parted from Him."

<sup>1</sup> Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xlv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xlv.

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life of the other there is right nought: for it is all one love.”<sup>1</sup>

This is clearly of one piece with the teaching of St. Paul. “That ye put off the old man . . . and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man”:<sup>2</sup> or, in the language that has been used, let the energies of the soul, the I, be withdrawn from identification with the lower self and redirected to the higher self which for St. Paul was Christ. In such phrases as “be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,” “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord,” the emphasis is laid on the necessity for a conscious effort so to redirect the forces of the soul to Christ as the higher self and the indwelling manifestation of God, that there may result a living consciousness of the divine. St. Paul himself was conscious of the condition in which the soul is torn between the attraction emanating from the divine self and its tendency to identify itself with the lower, when it is, so to speak, receiving intimations from the spirit that its only true home is therein, and that in the lower self it is in exile. “What I would, that do I not; but what I hate that do I. . . . For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing. . . . For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members,

<sup>1</sup> Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. lii. In a note to a passage which speaks of man as being “oned to the high Self above,” the editor of the *Revelations of Divine Love* quotes the following passage from the *Didascalion* of Hugo of St. Victor: “Man—seeing he is not a simple nature—in one aspect of his being, which is the better, and that I may speak more openly what I ought to speak, his very self, is immortal; but on the other side, which is weak and fallen, and which alone is known to those who have no faith except in sensible things, he is obnoxious to mortality and mutability.”

<sup>2</sup> Epistle to the Ephesians, chap. iv, 22-24.

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warring against the law of my mind . . . who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ”<sup>1</sup>

And lastly in Lopukhin, a Russian official living at the time of the French Revolution, who broke through the trammels of officialdom into the wider life of the children of God, the same eternal doctrine is formulated. “The radical method of invisibly destroying the sinful man is a profound denial of the self, which with the help of the spirit of love must finally be followed (so to speak) by a denial of the denial of the self. Not only must the I not act at all, it must not even have the feeling of its inaction, much less be permitted to enjoy it. . . . Self-love, the rule of the I, is the nest of sin.”<sup>2</sup> Here the profound denial of the self can only refer to the lower self as characterized by the sense of separateness, and the help of the spirit of love by which it is brought about is the attraction emanating from the higher and divine self, as the Christ-Spirit, of which the characteristic is the opposite of all limitation. The final denial of the denial of the self refers to the complete substitution of the higher and wider self, as that with which the soul or I is identified, for the lower limited self; so that being free from a consciousness which retains any hint of limitation it may be unable to realize its own annihilation.

The mystics whose statements have been considered may fairly be regarded as typical representatives of the standpoint which has been restated in Christian terms at various points in the world's history. They range from the middle of the first century to the beginning of the nineteenth in point of time, and throughout the whole of Europe in respect of place, and appear to have conceived the spiritual constitution of man in a manner compatible with that which was suggested at the outset. It remains to

<sup>1</sup> Epistle to the Romans, chap. xii, 2 ; vi, 11 ; vii, 15-24.

<sup>2</sup> I. V. Lopukhin, *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church*, chap. iv (3).



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sum up their conclusions and consider their implications in connection with the question of self-annihilation.

Their conclusions are clear. For the purpose of gaining a more lucid comprehension of the various aims towards which man can direct his energies they divided up those aims and those possibilities into two large sections. These sections they regarded as the two selves towards either of which the soul or I could tend, or as two aspects or ways of being in which activity was possible for the soul. As the soul tended towards or identified itself with either of the two selves or aspects, it was itself changed and moulded after the form of the self that was chosen. The chief characteristic of the lower self was all that made for the sense of I-hood; the soul as identified therewith became more and more clearly marked off and separated from everything else. In many cases this lower self was therefore symbolized by the body, as being, presumably, that which brought most clearly to mind the sensation of being shut in and cut off from other living creatures as by a wall or barrier; and further, in all probability, as being that of which the demands and desires and needs actually did manifest a certain measure of exclusiveness. The claim of I and Mine is perhaps more evidently an attribute of the body than of any other part of man, if for no other reason than that its needs are more especially of those things which are capable of being exhausted by acquisition, and it therefore stood as a convenient symbol by which to designate all which bore the character of exclusiveness and limitation. The higher self, on the other hand, was in its essence unlimited. It was spiritual, in the sense of the Spirit which is universal. It was divine, it was the manifestation of God dwelling in man, calling him continually to return to his proper home after the years of his exile. It was, in a word, Christ; and therefore by means of Christ, by means of the Real Self everlastingly present in him, man was able to be

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united even during this life with the vaster Spirit which is God. The desire of God for man is the complement of the desire of man for God, and the man's desire is as it were implanted in him by the desire of God—it is an answer of the soul in the first dim stages of its consciousness of the Spirit, to that Spirit's call, as an echo responding to the voice of Christ. For the mystics the Christ-state, the Christ-consciousness, is that state in which and that consciousness whereby man both becomes and knows his Real and Higher Self; as that Higher Self is at all times and can be only the Spirit of Christ which dwells in and is a part of man for his ultimate salvation. It has fulfilled Its office under a hundred names and received the supplications of unnumbered men: for the knowledge of It they have forded rivers of fire, and in knowing It have touched the heights of all felicity: yet to all time It is one and undivided; in It there is no hint of limitation. By a convention of language It has been called a self, but its very essence is selflessness; for a spiritual self which imports any sense of standing over against another spiritual self is a contradiction in terms. All Christs are one Christ, and in consciousness therein there is no shadow of separation.

Thus, if the expressions of the mystics of Christendom be adopted, if Christ be the only True, the only Real; if all else be only illusion and weariness; man *is*, of necessity and emphatically, Christ, in the sense that to be anything else, to identify himself with anything less than Spirit, is simply not to be in the real and ultimate sense. Till that identification be accomplished within the realm of his consciousness, however he faint in the fervour of his longing, he is incomplete, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled.

But the city of God is ringed about with great fortifications. The assault and the destruction of these are what the mystics have known as the annihilation of the self, and it is to this that they have therefore turned their energies.

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Surely the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence now as ever at the hands of men, but it is a violence of sanctified and redirected desire on the one hand, and on the other a violence of destruction wrought on the lower self. By the very fact of the soul being directed towards and identified with that which is divine in man in place of that which is limited, the soul as it knew itself beforehand in its identification with that limitation is destroyed and abolished utterly. This is the condition of re-birth—of the birth of what is literally a new man, in that from that time forward his desires and his motives are untainted by any suspicion of self-hood. It is a birth into a new kingdom of freedom, of which universality is the meaning and the life.



## Chapter Two

**F**ROM ONE POINT OF VIEW THE LIFE of St. Francis has the appearance of being chiefly a long and vigorous struggle to reach a state in which his lesser self should be so completely annihilated that the Divine Spirit would be enabled to work freely through him without let or hindrance of any kind. His efforts in this direction were valiant and unceasing, but while this aspect of his life is under consideration it should be remembered that it is the negative side of his character which is herein in evidence: the destruction of the lower self is definitely a means to an end, and not the end in itself; it is a preparation for a final consummation which is dependent thereon. The positive side of his life is the end to which that self-annihilation is directed, and that end, with St. Francis as with all the mystics, was the direct knowledge of and communion with God which was in fact the crown of all his struggles. It is this which must follow self-conquest as the day succeeds to the night; it is the resplendent effect of an ascertained cause, for where there is nothing of self in the consciousness, there is God.

It is well to begin with a general statement of the view which St. Francis himself expressed as to the value of self-conquest. In the atmospherically true tradition which has been handed down in the *Fioretti* he is described as explaining to Brother Leo the real meaning of perfect joy while they were returning across the hills and the plain from Perugia to Santa Maria degli Angeli below Assisi. After enumerating a variety of achievements which were apparently highly desirable—the power to work miracles and gain revelations, the force to effect conversions and to know

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the hidden properties of men and plants, and of the stars—he assured his bewildered companion that in such power and in such knowledge was not to be found the perfection of joy. It was not in knowledge or in good example that it lay, but in bearing with equanimity and unbroken peace the evil fortunes which might arise. He drew a vivid picture of the imaginary reception of himself and his companion at the hands of their brethren at Santa Maria, wherein he figured them as being ill-treated and turned away with abuse from the shelter and food of the community, and left shivering in the cold and the snow outside, adding that in suffering such treatment with patience and cheerfulness was joy made perfect. The tradition relates that he summed up the purpose of his discourse with the words: “And therefore hear the conclusion; above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Christ grants to his friends, is that of self-conquest,” and quoted the words of St. Paul to the effect that we may glory in the cross of tribulation and affliction, for this is our own.<sup>1</sup> But this view does not depend solely on the traditional account, for it occurs again among the writings which are universally admitted to be the genuine work of St. Francis. In the fifth Admonition he presents it again in the phraseology of St. Paul, saying that all other things are hurtful and we may not glory therein, but that in which we may glory is in our infirmities and in the Cross.<sup>2</sup> This may stand,

<sup>1</sup> *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (translation by W. Heywood), ch. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Writings of St. Francis* (translation by Father Paschal Robinson), p. 10. Cf. Father Cuthbert, *Life of St. Francis*, p. 224, note 1, where it is suggested that the Admonition may be Brother Leo's written *résumé* of the parable as handed down in tradition by the *Fioretti*, or another account of the same thought dictated by St. Francis himself. The second supposition seems the more probable. Cf. *Writings*, p. 3. Joergensen (*St. François d'Assise, sa Vie et son Œuvre*, book ii, chap. iv, p. 180, note 1) suggests that the account in the *Fioretti* is a development of the Admonition as written by St. Francis.



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then, as prime evidence of St. Francis' belief in the value and necessity of self-annihilation.

But it has been seen that the very idea of self-annihilation depends on a conception of there being two selves, of which the higher demands the destruction of the lower. The method suggested by St. Francis to bring this about through the cessation of the soul's identification with this lower part was to allow that part to drop out, so to speak, in all considerations of that to which different things should be attributed. He effected a complete dichotomy by which the self had no longer any claim at all: "Blessed is he who keeps nothing for himself, rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." He applied the Gospel words, that is, in a way that left the self no title to anything whatever, for between Caesar (who is anybody but the self) and God there is no place left for the self. It is an illuminating fact that the words occur after the statement that "the servant of God who does not trouble himself or get angry about anything lives uprightly and without sin,"<sup>1</sup> for the capacity of getting angry is essentially a characteristic of the lower part which regards itself as set over against some other self with regard to which anger is possible. Similarly in the traditional account St. Francis is credited with saying that every virtue and every good thing is of God and not of the creature, instancing himself as one of the vilest creatures upon earth through whom God had nevertheless chosen to do wonderful works, so that it might be clear that such works were not of the creature's own production, but directly attributable to God.<sup>2</sup> In such an utter dependence

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 13, Admonition 11. Cf. The Second Rule of the Friars Minor, chap. vii, *Writings*, p. 70, where St. Francis warns the ministers to "beware lest they be angry or troubled on account of the sins of others, because anger and trouble impede charity in themselves and in others."

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers*, x.

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on the divine force and in the conviction that such a force was the vitalizing impulse behind every phenomenon was rooted the whole of St. Francis' profound humility; he knew that of himself he was nothing, but that God was, in absolute fact, all.

With this feeling of the worthlessness of the lower self goes the conviction that the spiritual part, man in his essential aspect, is divine. It is precisely this divine part of him which makes deification possible, when the soul is identified, in its activity and its desires, with the Real and Higher Self. This is not the place to consider the views enunciated or implied by St. Francis in this connection,<sup>1</sup> but, as the sanctity of the higher self is the necessary complement to the undesirability of the lower, it may be noticed in passing that there is good evidence that he held the spirit of man to be divine. In the beginning of the apostrophe to man, at the end of which he exhorts him not to glory in anything except his infirmities as attributable to himself, he draws attention to the fact that man has been formed to the likeness of God according to his spirit.<sup>2</sup> This would seem to be less a mere repetition of the statement in the first chapter of Genesis that man was made after the image of God, than what may be called a practical application of that statement in order to bring out the fact that in his spiritual part man is here and now essentially divine.

If the peculiar taint and tendency of the lower part be the desire to separate itself from the rest of the world, a sign of its active presence will unquestionably be an inclination towards unnecessary eccentricity. To be eccentric is not to be spiritual, though the reverse of this may very possibly be true: sanctity is not assured either by imitating the eccentricities of the saints or inventing new ones.

<sup>1</sup> See below, chap. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Writings*, p. 10.

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The desire to differ from the generality of men, though it be excusable, is not in itself admirable unless the difference be aimed towards something higher than the general. There is, in fact, perhaps only one thing more thoroughly undesirable than gratuitous singularity, and that is a fear of being singular when such a thing is demanded by the spirit. This distinction appears very clearly in the example of St. Francis. One of his oldest biographers bears witness that from the time of his conversion "he ever loved to do common things, avoiding in everything singularity," which the biographer considers, in one sense correctly, to be "befouled with the blemish of every vice."<sup>1</sup> The reflection is not strikingly applicable in the connection in which Celano makes it, which was the refusal of St. Francis to eat some special food prepared for him by the priest of San Damiano when he was in course of rebuilding that church. The reason for the refusal was presumably the one which Celano himself suggests in the same paragraph, that St. Francis thought it well to prepare himself to support any kind of food in the life which he foresaw, but the fact of his avoidance of singularity in general, wherever such avoidance was possible, is well enough substantiated in other directions. On the occasions when he was eating with laymen who were not of the brethren, and when he had no particular object in preaching detachment or self-conquest to them by his example, he would conceal the fact that he ate practically nothing of the dishes so that he might not have any appearance of being different from them on account of his fasting.<sup>2</sup> Celano further attributes to him the opinion that it is better to give up many things than to shock the opinion of others, and this towards the end of his life when he was at Rieti for the sake of his eyes.<sup>3</sup> The care

<sup>1</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Lives of St. Francis*, ii, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *The Legend of St. Francis* (translation by E. G. Salter), chap. v sec. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, ii, 126.

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with which St. Francis concealed the Stigmata in every way which was possible, although there was more than the one reason for this, suggests the same dislike of appearing singular unless some higher claim demanded it.

But when he felt that the claims of convention militated against the necessities of the spiritual life, St. Francis acted with a force and a directness which leave no ground for supposing him to have been in any way intimidated by a regard for what was expected. This utter disregard of custom and opinion when he considered any spiritual question to be implicated is one of the most striking facts of his history, and is so evident at every step of any moment in his life that instances need not be multiplied at this point. As a minor, but direct, example of his complete fearlessness the incident vouched for by all his original biographers may serve. During a very bad attack of fever he had been persuaded to eat some chicken in the hope that it would give him strength, and he felt keenly that to eat such excellent food was inconsistent both with the rigorous treatment he generally accorded himself, and the idea held of him by the people in general. On his recovery he therefore ordered one of the brethren to put a halter round his neck and drag him naked round the city while he confessed his self-indulgence to everybody he met.<sup>1</sup> To him there was a definite spiritual consideration at stake, the consideration, namely, of his enjoying a reputation in disaccord with the facts, and he therefore took the most direct and striking method of letting the facts be known. In the face of such an incident, as of his whole life, it is not possible to believe that his desire to avoid singularity led him into a tame and passive acquiescence in the accepted customs of the world in which he lived.

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 52; Bonaventure, *Life of St. Francis* (translation by E. G. Salter), chap. vi, sec. 2; *The Mirror of Perfection* (translation by R. Steele), chap. lxi.



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A slightly different manner in which the restrictive qualities of the lower self naturally manifest is to be found in the feeling of shyness. To hesitate over any course of action because it is felt that it tends to ridicule or contempt at the hands of the world is to sacrifice such a course, whatever it be, to the promptings of a self which is, by its nature, cut off from the rest of the world in general. To submit to and be hindered by any such feeling is therefore to promote the growth of the self by reason of which such feelings are possible, for it is of the eternal nature of sacrifice to increase the power of that to which the sacrifice is made. Shame is, in fact, a praise-offering made to the self, no less than the more direct subservience to the self which comes under the general head of selfishness and self-seeking. St. Francis, therefore, very naturally turned his attention to the elimination of this feeling both in himself and his brethren at an early stage in the new life which he dedicated to the Spirit of Universality which is God.

During the period when he was engaged in repairing the ruined church of San Damiano in response to the command he had received while in prayer before the Crucifix therein, he wanted some oil to replenish its lamps. As he had renounced all claim to his father's money and possessed none of his own, the normal means of obtaining it were wanting, and he therefore went to Assisi to beg for it. But in front of the house in which he hoped to obtain the oil he found a crowd of people, and was suddenly so overcome with shyness that he went away without daring to make his request. As he went, however, the littleness and cowardice of his action struck him: he realized, apparently, that a life of dedication to all that was great and most spacious was not to be founded on timidities such as that to which he had just succumbed, and with a sudden resolve he determined to do violence to the propensities of his natural self. In the words of his biographer, "directing



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that noble spirit of his to heaven, he reproved his own cowardice and passed judgment on himself. Straightway he went back to the house, set forth aloud before all the cause of his shame, and in a kind of spiritual intoxication asked in French for oil and received it."<sup>1</sup> The result of his effort to repress the promptings of his lower restricted self was on this occasion, as on so many others in his life and the life of every man, a sudden and almost disproportionate access of spiritual joy and force which is a direct influx from all that is highest in man. The spiritual intoxication of which Celano speaks is not, surely, an exaggerated claim made by a devout biographer, but a literal fact and the inevitable result of any thorough repression of that which makes for limitation. It is not difficult to picture the exultation of St. Francis on this occasion, which caused him to break out into Provençal by a sheer excess of gladness—an exultation which must have seemed to him to have its source in something radically opposed to that which had caused his hesitation. His rebuke of himself had been thorough: he was not contented with simply going back to the house and asking for the oil with as little disturbance as possible, but he made an especial point of explaining to the assembled crowd the details of his cowardice. He cleansed himself thereby of the contamination of his timidity, he exposed as it were to the light of the sun the smallness and imperfections of his lesser self (and thereby went a long way towards annihilating them), and as a result was filled with the spaciousness and power which are ever ready to fulfil a soul which shall properly be made ready.

The view of St. Francis on this question of the desirability of overcoming the feeling of shame in begging is put beyond all doubt by another passage from Celano. He states in the first place that St. Francis attached a definite

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 13. See also the *Legend*, 24.

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value to the effort of self-repression necessary in begging alms from door to door, and made use of alms so gathered more willingly than of those that had been freely offered. The emphasis, that is, is laid on the violence done to the sense of shyness rather than on the alms itself, and begging thereby becomes a spiritual exercise as well as, and more than, a means of obtaining nourishment and clothing. "To be ashamed of begging is hostile to salvation," for such a shame is as an incense burnt before the shrine of limitation.<sup>1</sup> But secondly, in this case as in all others, St. Francis insisted on the necessity of doing even acts of self-repression not only with resignation, but with joy. Knowing in his own case that a true effort to stamp out the tendencies of the lower self was followed by a very real spiritual joy, he looked for evidences of such joy in the brethren around him. To quote Celano again: "At Portiuncula a brother returning with alms from Assisi began when he was now near the 'place' to break forth into song, and to praise the Lord with a loud voice. On hearing this the Saint suddenly jumped up, ran out, kissed the brother's shoulder, and said, taking the wallet on his own shoulder, 'Blessed be my brother who goes readily, seeks humbly, and returns rejoicing.'"<sup>2</sup> In this readiness, humility, and joy St. Francis saw the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

A very evident source of sustenance for the lower aspect of the soul is the desire for praise and commendation and the corresponding dislike of blame. It is patently a separated I, if the phrase may be used, which clamours for praise—it is the natural selfhood demanding homage from

<sup>1</sup> See Celano, ii, 71. Cf. *ibid.*, ii, 75: "Blessed Francis often used to say that a true Lesser Brother ought not to remain long without going for alms. 'And the nobler my son is,' said he, 'the readier let him be to go, for in such wise merits are heaping up for him.'"

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 76.

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others so that it may be exalted in its own sight and in theirs. To the extent to which praise is taken to itself the lower part divides itself off from its neighbours: its exaltation is an exaltation to their detriment, and its natural instinct is to claim adulation as the breath of its life. The claim is not only to receive the praise, but to have deserved it: to feel that any good thing is the result of the activity of the limited self. The danger of praise is so a danger which increases in direct proportion to success, and one that can only be obviated by a resolute determination to turn the commendation in the direction of the sole source of all that is good, and is therefore the sole due object of praise. Instinct as it is with the divine universality, the higher aspect of the soul can receive the praises of all the world without incurring the danger of enhancing the sentiment of selfhood, for that sentiment is the one thing outside its range. St. Francis laid particular stress on this point in his sketch of the ideal Minister-General for the Minor Brethren. He explained that the Minister-General should indeed be paid all reverence and honour as the representative of Christ, but that he ought to receive honours and abuse with the same equanimity. "Yet it will behove him not to smile on honours; nor to rejoice more in favours than in injuries, so that his manners be not changed by honours except for the better," as Brother Leo relates it;<sup>1</sup> and the tradition goes to the length of saying of St. Francis and his companions that "being reviled they rejoiced and at honours they were afflicted."<sup>2</sup> It does not seem that this is likely to be an exaggeration of the fact, for, to men the first effort of whose life was to crush out the passion for recognition, the reception of honours must

<sup>1</sup> *The Mirror of Perfection*, lxxx. See also Celano, ii, 186.

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers*, v. Cf. St. Bonaventure, vi, 1: "He rejoiced in railings and was saddened by praise. He would liefer hear himself reviled than praised."

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have seemed very dangerous payment for their work in the world, and abuse the best help to lead them to their goal. St. Francis recognized the peculiar danger to himself of the flood of adulation which inevitably accompanied his more apparent and signal successes, and went to some lengths to convince the crowds of the fact that he was by no means as perfect as they imagined him to be.<sup>1</sup> A passage from *The Mirror of Perfection* expresses his disclaimers in this direction and his whole attitude towards the people's praise so vividly that it may be well to reproduce it in its entirety. "For when the holy Father used to be praised and called holy, he was wont to answer to such speeches, saying: 'I am not yet so secure, that I ought not to have sons and daughters. For at whatever hour the Lord should take away from me the treasure which He has commended to me, what else would remain to me but body and soul, which even infidels have? Nay, I ought to believe that if the Lord should have granted so many and so great gifts to a thief or an infidel as to me they would have been more faithful to their Lord than I. For, as in the picture of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin painted on wood, the Lord and the Blessed Virgin are honoured, and yet the wood and the picture take nothing of it to themselves, so the servant of God is in a manner a picture of God, wherein God is honoured on account of his goodness. But he ought to take nothing of this to himself, since in respect of God, he is less than the wood and the picture, nay he is pure nothing. And therefore unto God alone must the glory and honour be rendered, but unto him only shame and tribulation while he lives among the miseries of this life.'"<sup>2</sup> In this passage St. Francis suggests an attitude in which nothing else is recognized as

<sup>1</sup> See Joergensen, *St. François d'Assise*, book iii, chap. i, pp. 215 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> *The Mirror of Perfection*, xlv. Cf. Bonaventure, vi, 3.

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having any real being except God: "in respect of God, man is pure nothing," and to man, therefore, nothing must be attributed. That of him which is apparent is simply the background on which, in the servant of God, Deity must be superposed, and in proportion as this occurs his life becomes real. For his real life is the life of his soul in its connection with the higher part, or in regard to its higher aspects—it is in relation to that of him which is divine that he can be regarded as being in any real sense. Outside this region of reality there can be only an existence which is in some part illusory, even if that illusion be only the mistaking of the part for the whole. "Blessed is the servant who does not regard himself as better when he is esteemed and extolled by men than when he is reputed as mean, simple, and despicable: for what a man is in the sight of God, so much he is and no more."<sup>1</sup>

On the reverse side of the medal—the attitude to be maintained in face of accusation and abuse—St. Francis insisted no less strongly. For abuse is hard to bear only for the soul in its identification with the lower self, which resents the intrusion of any views other than its own very limited ones. It is, in fact, the very spirit of antagonism to which antagonism is insufferable, and the higher attitude in which that tendency has no part is that against which its arrows are spent in vain. The higher self is invulnerable just because it is universal, and when the soul is identified therewith it recognizes its essential unity with the real selves of all other men, and so knows in very truth that from them to it no hurt is possible. To resent a wrong is therefore to swerve from the path of equanimity at the call of the lower self, and to increase the power of that self by so doing. It battens, so to speak, upon resentment and division, and is starved into impotence by the refusal to

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 16, Admonition 20. See also Bonaventure, vi, 1.



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submit to its leading. This point finds its due place among the spiritual counsels which have come down to us under the name of the Admonitions of St. Francis, in which he says: "He truly loves his enemy who does not grieve because of the wrong done to himself, but who is afflicted for love of God because of the sin on his brother's soul."<sup>1</sup> Further, however: the natural inclination of the lower self under rebuke is to fight in its own defence. It feels, as it were, that the attack is threatening its very existence, and it makes violent efforts to justify its own claim to being. The natural and instinctive movement in the face of accusation is to repel it by a vigorous denial, irrespective in general of the justice or injustice with which the accusation is made. It follows therefore that, if this aspect of the soul is to be crushed out, the instinctive tendency to self-excuse must be controlled, and that not only by abstaining from explanation and excuse when the accusation is just, but also when it has no foundation whatever. To justify oneself is, in the majority of cases, to submit to the spirit of separation clamouring for recognition. For some such reasons, it may well be, St. Francis included in his counsels for the spiritual life the admonition in which it is said: "Blessed is the servant who bears discipline, accusation, and blame from others as patiently as if they came from himself. Blessed is the servant who, when reproved, mildly submits, modestly obeys, humbly confesses, and willingly satisfies. Blessed is the servant who is not prompt to excuse himself, and who humbly

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 12, Admonition 9. Cf. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xl. "For He willeth that we be like Him in wholeness of endless love to ourself and to our even-Christians: no more than His love is broken to us for our sin, no more willeth He that our love be broken to ourself and to our even-Christians: but [that we] endlessly hate the sin and endlessly love the soul, as God loveth it." And the *Cloud of Unknowing*, chap. xxix: "Nevertheless deeds may lawfully be judged, but not the man, whether they be good or evil."

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bears shame and reproof for sin when he is without fault.”<sup>1</sup>

But in the delicately balanced condition of those who are yet at the beginning of the life of the spirit another species of resentment frequently makes itself apparent. Not to resent ill usage is so clear and well defined a precept that it is present, as a precept in any case, in the minds of all, but even when a condition of equanimity in this respect has been arrived at, there often remains the tendency to resent not the evil, but the good which is apparent in the lives of others. It is a tendency which is particularly insidious because it so easily takes the guise of a wise and detached discrimination, which pretends to penetrate below the surface of the apparent spiritual progress of another and discover reasons for the impossibility of its existence, while in fact it springs from a grudging unwillingness to admit that such progress can have been made while the critic has remained comparatively stationary. It is not, as might be imagined, confined to the rarified atmosphere of the monastery, but is as present in the outer world and to-day as ever it was in the convents of the Middle Ages. St. Francis' comment on the subject is as direct and forcible as usual: “Whosoever envies his brother on account of the good which the Lord says or does in him, commits a sin akin to blasphemy, because he envies the Most High Himself who says and does all that is good.”<sup>2</sup> For if there be good in a man it is not, on the hypothesis, the lower self which is responsible for it. “Blessed is that servant,” he said in a continuation of the benedictions of the Sermon on the Mount, “who is not more puffed up because of the

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 17, Admonition 23. Cf. the attitude which St. Francis sketched as desirable in the imaginary case of his being abused when preaching at one of the Chapters (Bonaventure, vi, 5; *The Mirror of Perfection*, lxiv; Celano, ii, 145).

<sup>2</sup> *Writings*, p. 12, Admonition 8.

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good the Lord says and works through him than because of that which He says and works through others.”<sup>1</sup> All good in man, that is, is the prerogative of that part of him which is divine, which is in fact God in man, and the position to be striven for is that in which the God and the good in each man recognizes and acclaims itself all the world over.

In the three Admonitions in which he comments on the words of the Sermon on the Mount, St. Francis lays stress upon the need for self-annihilation to be an interior process making for largeness and against separation, rather than an exterior process of subjection merely. It is the positive aspect of the situation. “‘Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ Many apply themselves to prayers and offices, and practise much abstinence and bodily mortification, but because of a single word which seems to be hurtful to their bodies or because of something being taken from them, they are forthwith scandalized and troubled. These are not poor in spirit: for he who is truly poor in spirit, hates himself and loves those who strike him on the cheek.” To be poor in spirit is to abolish that which makes for separation and resentment, for on such an abolition depends the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven in which the King also shall be known. “‘Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.’ They are truly peacemakers who amidst all they suffer in this world maintain peace in soul and body for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In both these cases it is the interior peace which is important, and neither the exterior mortification nor the attempt to reconcile enemies holds the first place, though it follow that the interior peace which is of God indwelling effects reconciliation and makes for peace also externally.

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 15, Admonition 17.

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“ ‘ Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.’ They are clean of heart who despise earthly things and always seek those of heaven, and who never cease to adore and contemplate the Lord God Living and True, with a pure heart and mind.”<sup>1</sup>

When the self has been trained into submission, when its natural instinct to claim for itself has been supplanted by the desire to give to others, when, in fact, its power as a source of limitation has been partly done away with, there is likely to remain a very insidious manifestation of its activity and continued existence. It becomes evident in the movement to commend itself for whatever good acts may be done, and in so doing it perpetrates a subtle kind of spiritual theft. On reflection it is obvious that the good, the outward-flowing actions in man are the work of that part of him which can make no claim to recognition simply because it is unable to recognize itself as separated, and that the lower part is by the definition incapable of, for example, an uninterested act of charity: its nature is not to give, but to take. But the moment that an act of charity is done, in all unconsciousness that it is an act of charity—for conscious virtue is as impossible as unconscious sin—the soul turns, so to speak, with amazing rapidity from the unconscious, outgoing action of its higher aspect, to the indrawing self-seeking movement of the lower. The claim is made: I did that, and self-commendation follows in the natural course. The selfhood filches, that is, from the selfless part its good actions, and attributes them to itself with praise. This spiritual theft appears as the least eradicable part of selfhood, and one that can be best combated by an exposure of its meanness. To admit openly the self-satisfaction that has been felt is to strike at its very root, to cut away all the foundation on

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, pp. 14-15, Admonitions 14, 15, 16.

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which it rests, and when St. Francis found himself in danger of spiritual self-satisfaction of this nature he immediately took this course. In the words of Celano, which are corroborated by *The Mirror of Perfection*: "He would, if ever his spirit were moved to vainglory, at once reveal it before all men by open confession. Once when he was walking through Assisi he met an old woman who asked him to give her something. Having nothing but a cloak, with ready bounty he gave her that. But perceiving an impulse to self-complacency stealing over him, he immediately confessed before all the bystanders that he had had vainglory in his action."<sup>1</sup> And in words the trenchancy of which is the seal of their genuineness the same biographer continues that he would say to his brethren: "The flesh . . . claims for itself, and transfers to its own glory what has been given not to it, but to the soul. It gathers from without praise for its virtues, applause for its watchings and prayers. It leaves the soul nothing, and seeks payment even for its tears."<sup>2</sup>

The lower self, the natural man, the old Adam, man as he is in his unregenerate state, then, must die. These are not mere words—phrases invented to shroud an inexplicable mystery: they convey the literal fact that only by such a death can man reach to the real full life of which he is capable. By reason of the transference of the energies and desires from the lower to the higher of the soul's aspects, the man as he was known before the process began dies literally—he ceases to exist as he was, and in respect of his selfhood he is no more. In the place of the man as he was is born a new man in whom freedom takes the place of limitation and universality the place of separateness. It is in this spacious region of the new birth that, in the language of theology, all the virtues reside and from which all good-

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 132. See also *The Mirror of Perfection*, lxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 134.



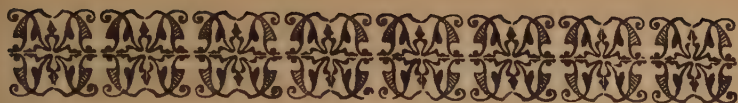
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ness flows, and the attainment of any virtue in its fullness is therefore dependent on this mystical death. "O all ye most holy virtues," cried St. Francis, "may the Lord, from whom you proceed and come, save you! There is absolutely no man in the whole world who can possess one among you unless he first die. He who possesses one and does not offend the others, possesses all; and he who offends one, possesses none and offends all."<sup>1</sup> This sphere of regeneration is the realm alone in which virtues are possible, for virtue ultimately consists in an attitude and not in any act itself: the question is of being virtuous, if the term is to be employed, rather than of doing virtuous things. To be in the place of virtues is to possess them all by the very fact, and to be without it is to fall short of any virtue in its entirety. In the realm of universality to have one is to have all, but in the realm of separation it is not possible really to have anything.


The truth of self-annihilation is that it is the one means to freedom, and its final maxim is therefore that independence does not mean self-dependence, but dependence only on God. But God also is within, and in the knowledge of the indwelling Deity lies the source of all power and all sustenance and all grace. And St. Francis bore his witness that in such dependence strength was to be found. When the first few brethren were sent out to preach, and, it is said, at all times when he gave any obedience, he said to each one singly, as his final counsel for the journey: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee."<sup>2</sup> In such a non-dependence on themselves lay the triumph both of St. Francis and all the victors in the battles of the spirit.

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 21. Salutation of the Virtues.

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, iii, 7. Celano (i, 29) gives the recommendation in a slightly different form: "Cast thy thought on the Lord and He will nourish thee."



## Chapter Three

INCE THE ANNIHILATION OF THE self is the method by which mysticism proceeds towards its end of the knowledge of and communion with God, it may be looked for with every prospect of success among all people and communities where the knowledge of God is expressly put forward as the purpose of their existence. It may thus be postulated without hesitation as the foundation of the religious life.

The outstanding feature of this life within the pale of Christendom, which is the extent of the present concern, is found in the three vows by which a seal was placed on the complete dedication of a life to God—the vows by which that life was bound to obedience, to poverty, and to chastity. Herein, then, it may be expected that there will be found subdivisions of the general principle of self-annihilation, directed towards the different aspects under which the lower self is mainly in evidence. It may make for clearness to take the three vows, tentatively at any rate, as corresponding to three large aspects of man which may be called the will, the mind, and the emotions respectively. The extent to which the emotions became identified with the body will be considered in due course. The correspondence is perhaps not perfect on the surface, but it may serve as a point of departure for a consideration of the implications of the monastic vows in their bearing on the essential method of mysticism.

Since the whole evil of the lower self is separateness, the will which has to be destroyed is the will to separateness—the personal will which sets itself and its aims over against

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the will of others, and demands its own satisfaction at any cost whatever. It is either a misconception or a wilful misstatement, to represent the mystic as attempting to destroy the whole force of his life in this effort to subjugate the personal will, as though his aim were to become ungoverned and undirected, veering round with every impulse from without; it is a question of supersession rather than abolition *per se*, and that which supersedes the limited and separated will is the universal will of God. The annihilation of the personal will, that is, is—again—a definite means to a clearly conceived end, and it is only when it is taken as an end in itself that any misconception can arise.

But while the end is to permit the divine will to replace the personal will, the method of so uprooting the personal will that the divine may take its place is a long and arduous process. It is not possible immediately to obliterate all signs and traces of what has, in the majority of cases, held a long and autocratic rule: it is a procedure in which many short steps and the burden of much detail are inevitable, not the wide heroic sweep of an advance which brings the traveller straight to the throne of God.

Speaking very widely, there are two methods of universalizing the will. The first is so to increase its force by dint of continual effort that it ends by becoming all-embracing and all-conquering, brooking no opposition whatever, but carrying all before it in an impetuous onrush towards its goal. This, however, is not without its dangers, for though, if it be carried to its term, it may lead its possessor to the direct knowledge of the Highest, it lays him open in a particular manner to precisely that self-interest which must eventually be abolished. If the will of a man be of such force and vitality that it bows to no obstacles, but cuts directly through them to its end, it will only be by an especial sanctity of purpose that he will escape the employment of his will for his own personal desires. It is a

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process singularly akin to playing with fire, and unless the dedication be perfect, the result will be a holocaust of all that is most holy—the destruction, namely, of what is highest and most spacious in man. The second method, which is pre-eminently that of mysticism, proceeds on other lines. Instead of directly attempting to make the personal will universal by a process of intensification and widening, its method is to deny the personal will in its tendency to separateness on every occasion which presents itself. It is thus, in comparison with the first method which has been mentioned, a negative rather than a positive process, but negative only in the sense of negating separateness. By a not unlikely paradox it widens the personal will by denying it: it is therefore negative in one aspect, but positive, in that it makes for the universalization of the will, in the other. For fundamentally it is with the will as with the self since the will is regarded virtually as a subdivision of that self and that by which it is directed: it is a force which is capable of direction in either of two ways, and can only be spoken of as comprising two wills for convenience of expression. The universal will is one aspect of the will, or, rather, one direction in which it may be turned: while the personal will is another aspect and a diametrically opposed direction in which the one will may be turned. Thus the very fact of the denial of the personal will promotes the activity of the universal will, for the will in one aspect or the other continues always to act, and if the barriers of separateness be broken down it will flow unhindered in its fullness.

It is with this second method, then, that mysticism is concerned; and here again there must be conceived an attraction, or as it were a suggestion made by that which is higher and more spacious in man, which implants in him the desire and endows him with the capacity to direct his will to the universal rather than the personal. One of the

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most obvious methods of annihilating the personal will is to discover what that will is, and then, quite simply, to do the opposite. St. John of the Cross tabulated his recommendations in this connection, and they stand as evidence of what is possible in the way of rigour. They were for him a means of entering into the night of sense which was an inevitable step on the path. "Strive always," he says, "not after that which is most easy, but after that which is most difficult. Not after that which is most pleasant, but after that which is most unpleasant. Not after that which giveth pleasure, but after that which giveth none. Not after that which is consoling, but after that which is afflictive. Not after that which ministers repose, but after that which ministers labour. Not after great things, but after little things. Not after that which is higher and precious, but after that which is lower and despised. Strive not to desire anything, but rather nothing. Seek not after that which is better, but after that which is worse . . ." <sup>1</sup> It would be difficult to overestimate the efficacy of such a process in abolishing the inclinations of the lower self. There would be left, in fact, no I capable of willing anything by the time that it had been brought to its conclusion, and the will of God might therefore well be the sole instigation to action.

An equally evident means of denying the personal will with a view to its ultimate destruction is to prefer to it on any occasion the will of no matter whom. If the desirable thing is to be able eventually to say, "God wills," instead of "I will," and as the "I will" must be abandoned before the "God wills" can take its place, it is one step on the road to be able to say, "You will" whenever the occasion may arise. It is not, it would in fact be nonsensical to suppose, that the will of no matter whom is necessarily any

<sup>1</sup> *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I, xiii, 6.



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more the will of God than is the mystic's own personal will, but to do it rather than his own is an excellent training against the time when an opposition may arise between what is felt to be actually God's will and his own. Such preparation in apparently insignificant details abounds in the life of spiritual endeavour, and it appears as one of the secrets of success in that life to be able continually to fly in the face of common sense, and repeatedly to magnify into mountains what normally appear as molehills. There are few who would not behave with some measure of heroism in the face of a tremendous tragedy, or at a time which was recognized to constitute some great spiritual crisis: the very recognition of the fact that great issues are involved suffices in the majority of cases to put men on their mettle and cause them to take wider views and less self-centred action than are customary. The sense of strain and crisis changes the whole quality of their activity. And the records of sanctity are full of cases where an incident that normally would appear unimportant receives a degree of care and consideration which only avoids the accusation of disproportion when it is remembered that to the mystic all the apparently trifling details of a life are so many steps by which he may mount to his proper home. There is in truth nothing unimportant, nothing trifling, but only man who makes it so by a system of values which, from the spiritual standpoint, are demonstrably false. The submission to the will of another, then, simply because he is another, and not because it is fantastically imagined that he represents the divine will in any especial degree, serves in the first place as a training and a preparation for the time when the mandate of the divine will shall clearly appear, and in the second as an actual and present destruction of the personal and completely separated will.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lopukhin, *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church*, chap.

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But while it is possible for every one to find among his neighbours and his friends a sufficiency of people to whose wills he can submit his own, the devout Catholic is saved the trouble of making a choice by the provision of an already constituted authority. In the last resort the will of the Church is final and supreme for him in small matters as in large, and the detailed regulations she has drawn up in things both temporal and eternal, for his most intimate concerns as for his public actions, testify to the thoroughness with which she has fulfilled her office. For those Catholics who live in communities which are specially dedicated to the religious life, the head of the community plays the part of intermediary between the Church and her subjects: for those whose place is in the world the priesthood is ever at hand to act as the official mouthpiece. The Church thus stands for something bigger and higher and wider than the individual, as something more general with which his will may be identified and so rescued from the purely personal direction. She offers herself as a perpetual substitute, and in the acceptance of her will in the place of the personal will may unquestionably be found just that opportunity for renunciation which has been seen to constitute so excellent a preparation.

There is, however, a striking characteristic of the mystic's attitude which at first sight presents some difficulty in this connection. Whatever may be his creed, his period, or the measure of his achievement, there is one firm

viii (3) : "It is by so forcing the corrupt will of our degraded nature, which is absolutely opposed to the divine will, that we best labour to divest ourselves of the old man, and it is by this violence that our soul forces the Kingdom of God. It is both useful and necessary often to break our own will, and resist it even in the smallest things, so doing by a burning zeal for Jesus Christ the Crucified. This continual struggle against our own will, maintained in a good end, prepares us in a particular manner for the true denial, and attracts to us the spirit of grace."

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and unshaken conviction which in some degree marks him off from the large body of his co-religionists, and constitutes the essence of his position. He believes—more, he knows with unalterable certainty—that the one thing of supreme value for any one who aspires to the fulness of the life of the spirit is actual experience: this is the means and the earnest of his advance and a phenomenon for which no substitute is possible. Were all the world to shake with the reiterated assurances of the faithful that God is here or God is there, he would be unable, by reason of the very temperament which constitutes him a mystic, to rest content without rendering the fact a part of his own experience. His purpose is to know God experimentally, and for such an intent substituted experience is of little or no value. Is it possible to reconcile this emphasis on the necessity for actual experience with the desire which by the hypothesis is his, to annihilate his personal will by every possible means? Is not the very desire for the actual experimental knowledge an evidence of the personal will?

The answer, it would seem, is that inasmuch as the characteristic of the personal will is that it makes for separateness, and the knowledge of God makes for universality, it is not possible for the desire to know God by means of actual experience to spring from the personal will. If man were, in a favourite phrase, “merely man,” which, if it mean anything, must mean that he is not also in some way divine, it does not appear that there could enter into his consciousness even the conception of the higher, nor into his desires the impulse thereto. For, as has been seen in the opening chapter, man *is* his consciousness, and it is because the divine has some part therein that the kingdom of heaven is indisputably within him. If such a desire could spring from the lower aspects of the will it would be a move on their part towards self-destruction, which is against the probabilities on account of their

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very nature. The desire must again be regarded as an instigation from the higher aspects of the will, spurring it on to wage war on limitation and join itself to the ranks of the hosts of God.

The claim of the Church to speak as the representative of God and to be the channel *par excellence*, if not the sole channel, by which the divine will is known to mankind, places it in an unrivalled position as the authority to which the personal will should be submitted. In so far as it fulfils this office of intermediary it is for the majority of its subjects a court from which there can and should be no appeal possible: *vox ecclesiae, vox Dei*; and, unless access be obtained to the King, to rebel against its commandments is to rebel by implication against the King Himself. But among the faithful there is a small body of men and women, "the Open Secret Society of the Mystics," who make just this claim to have gained a direct and actual knowledge of the King; to have penetrated into His most secret chambers, and communed with Him in the silence of desire. They bring back from these dim communings—dim to the many because their eyes are veiled, but to them resplendent with the glory of another world—ineffable memories, and knowledge which it is not lawful to tell, for the law of the King in His sanctuary is not the law of the world. For the mystics, therefore, there is an authority higher than that of the Church, there is a voice speaking with a wider right of command. It is evident that for those who can learn the will of the Absolute Ruler by direct intercourse, the offices of an intermediary are not only unnecessary, but in the last resort can only serve to distort that will in the ministries of interpretation.

The logical outcome of the position of the mystic is thus to do away with the *raison d'être* of the Church as an intermediary and interpreter so far as he is himself concerned. But it is not at all times nor for all things that the offices



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of the Church are found superfluous. The mystic is rarely born fully fledged, as it were, capable of mounting to the dizzyest heights of divine contemplation without effort or preparation: his life is in part a life of detailed and laborious training, and it is only at the end of this period that he comes into his heritage of conscious communion with God. Until this time come it is natural for the mystic to consider his Church as providing the most desirable surroundings for his preparation, and natural also for his attitude towards it to be coloured by his fundamental standpoint. Besides acting as a temporary substitute, it provides an atmosphere which, in certain respects, makes for the spiritual progress of its members. After all has been said in the way of criticism, the Church is ultimately concerned with the same matter as the mystic, and for him it may well prepare the way for the establishment of a divine relation. Simply because its concern is explicitly with high things, it has a very high value for those who are skilled enough to interpret its often distorted messages, and clear-sighted enough to take the good in its institutions and put aside the bad. And in spite of the fact that no church has yet been founded that has not, to some extent, travestied and corrupted the teachings of its founder, there must remain beneath the husks and refuse of its instituted conventionalities some germ of the truth that gave it birth. And it is not impossible that the capacity to extract from any church the essence of its original value varies with the extent to which the universality of search for divine things and the power of penetration of the mystic are possessed. Inasmuch, also, as the Church serves, by means of its rituals and its feasts, its sacrifices and its pageantry, as a perpetual call to divine things and a perpetual reference to divine events, it retains a certain very real value for the mystic as a continual reminder of that to which his life is dedicated. It may often be that the high events to which the rituals refer suffer mis-



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construction, but ultimately every ritual is open to precisely as many constructions as there are spectators and participants, and however much the meaning may be veiled it is for the mystic to transmute and elevate the great signs and words to their hidden and original beauty.

But there is a point at which the ministrations of the Church fail in their usefulness to him. That towards which he has set his face is universal, and anything which tends to limitation is therefore a less thing than his ideal and restrictive of his progress. But all churches are universal in their own eyes, and all competitors are, therefore, pretenders. The universality they desire is a universality of quantity, while that of the mystic is of quality, and a merely numerical universality is very different from the living universality of actual being, which is that of the spirit. For any church to claim that it is universal is to exclude those who are not within its pale, and condemn the tenets and the doctrines of all its competitors: and while the churches raise the false banner of mutual exclusiveness, a true Church of God must be impossible in the external order. It can only be built when it is realized by the churches, as it has always been realized by that which is most vital in mysticism, that exclusiveness is death and that universality stands for inclusiveness. Till then the Church of God is in the hands of the mystics—creedless and universal. This limitation of scope on the part of orthodoxy stands as the dividing point of the ways of the churches and the mystics, for liberty of search is essential to the spirit of mysticism, and for it there can be no place or creed or institution where it is not at liberty to seek help on the journey and knowledge of the end.

When, therefore, any claim is made by the Church to decide along which paths, and by what particular means, spiritual progress is permissible, when, in fact, any limit is placed to the mystic's power to advance by any means

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that are possible, at that moment the official pronouncements of the Church cease to hold his attention, and are in effect disregarded by him. And it is that something outside all churches and beyond all creeds which is in the breast of every mystic, that gives him the strength and the duty so to disregard the authority of his church, whether he be in apparent conformity or open difference. In the ultimate analysis he must regard the Church as a means, and in no way as an end, for the end is that to which the Church ministers. If he have heard the voice of God speaking in the inmost places of his being, he has reached that final authority from which there can be no appeal: Christ is greater than His Church, and His will must override the Church's will. It is to this divine will that the mystic aims at subjecting his personal will, and when this becomes possible the temporary substitute is put away whenever, and in so far as, it is in disagreement therewith. For in truth it is no longer necessary. "To receive God's commands and His counsel and all His teaching, is the privilege of the inward man, after that he is united with God. And where there is such a union, the outward man is surely taught and ordered by the inward man, so that no outward commandment or teaching is needed. But the commandments and laws of men belong to the outer man, and are needful for those men who know nothing better, for else they would not know what to do and what to refrain from. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

In considering the life of any individual mystic in his relations with his church, allowance must be made for the fact that his qualities and his attitude as a mystic probably do not exhaust the whole of his character. He is also an individual with natural tendencies peculiar to himself and his surroundings: his creed and the institutions of his

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. xxxix.

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church must naturally colour his actions to a large extent; his nationality, his rank even, his upbringing, will all play their part in deciding the numerous details of his behaviour. It is only of him in his character of mystic, on certain occasions and at certain stages in his mystical life, that the tendency to rebel against ecclesiastical authority will be apparent. Nor is this almost instinctive tendency to revolt peculiar to those who have fallen under the ban of the Church's displeasure. It is true that when mysticism has been taken to its logical conclusion, and it has been pointed out that the institutions and sacraments of the Church are not universally necessary to salvation; when emphasis has been laid on the fact that more spiritual progress may result from mental prayer than from observing the Church's instructions; it is true that when this has been done the condemnation has been pronounced with no uncertainty, and the movement which included these heresies in its propaganda has been, as in the case of Quietism, ruthlessly suppressed. But the history of Catholic mysticism contains cases of determined continuance of what has been felt to be the divine will in the face of the direct disapproval of the authorities, by sons and daughters of the Church who have escaped any hint of condemnation. It may be sufficient to give two examples from the life of St. Teresa, who is accepted by the Church as among the most severely orthodox and the most minutely obedient of her children.

At the period in her life when she began to return with increased application to mental prayer, she frequently experienced a high state which is known as the Prayer of Union, as well as that of the Prayer of Quiet. The consolations that she received in these states were so great that she had some fear of delusion, on account of certain women who had apparently been similarly favoured and, it eventually transpired, had been deluded. At the same time she felt a very deep conviction that God was with her, especially

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in prayer, and that she was growing better and stronger on account of her prayer. In this dilemma she determined to consult an ecclesiastic of considerable repute for learning and piety, and take his advice as to her condition. His counsel was that she should give up her way of prayer and proceed as if she were in a much more advanced state than she felt herself to be in at the moment. She therefore determined not to take his advice, and consulted a layman whom she considered to be well versed in spiritual direction. The layman, however, was no more encouraging than the priest, and after some consideration both of them concluded that St. Teresa was deluded by an evil spirit. On their advice, it is said, she then applied to a Jesuit Father, who assured her that her extraordinary states of prayer were quite genuinely the work of God, and that she must persist energetically with mental prayer and not, on any account, give it up.<sup>1</sup>

It does not seem an exaggeration to say that in this case St. Teresa was moved in all her actions by the underlying conviction that her method of prayer was right and truly the work of God. The surface doubts and questionings arising from a comparison of her own condition with that of other women contemplatives of the period, led her to seek an authoritative affirmation of the fact that she was not deluded, but when her application to a representative of the Church failed to secure this affirmation, she unhesitatingly refused to accept his decision. Her judgment of the ecclesiastic to whom she first went is severe and final—it has just the finality which comes from a God-given conviction of being under divine guidance—and she says frankly that if she had only had that ecclesiastic to confer with, she believes that her soul would have made no progress. She adds that her inability to do as he suggested gave her great

<sup>1</sup> *Life of St. Teresa*, by herself, chap. xxiii.



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pain,<sup>1</sup> but the fact remains that the interior conviction of the mystic carried the day in spite of the grief caused to the would-be obedient daughter of the Church. To consult a layman in these circumstances was to apply to an authority not strictly recognized by the Church, but indeed the mystic is willing to gain help and encouragement from any source available, with a certain disrespect for the strict considerations of orthodoxy, so long as there appears to be some measure of divine illumination. But as her lay adviser coincided no more with her convictions than the ecclesiastic had done, St. Teresa was impelled to seek until she found some confirmation of her method. Having succeeded in this, she sought no farther on her own part, and only left the confessor who was in agreement with her when he was compelled to leave her neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> At first sight it would appear that there is some inconsistency in this unshakable certainty of being in the right way, and the desire to gain an authoritative confirmation of the fact, but it is to be remembered, as has been already noticed, that the mystic is not mystic pure and unalloyed, but is also tinged with the inclinations of his or her particular circumstances. In the case of St. Teresa it was the mystic which imparted to her the certainty of conviction, and the daughter of the Church which impelled her to seek until she found an authoritative sanction.

The other example in the life of the same saint of a divine conviction persisting under, and eventually triumphing over, all opposition was in connection with the foundation of the monastery of St. Joseph. She had, in her own language, a vision, in which God promised that the monastery should be built, and the vision was so efficacious that she could not possibly doubt that it came from Him. She saw that the foundation of the monastery was His will,

<sup>1</sup> *Life of St. Teresa*, by herself, chap. xxiii, sec. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xxiv, secs. 4, 5.



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and in the vision received instructions to tell her confessor not to put hindrances in her way. The confessor did not tell her definitely to abandon the idea, but suggested that she should lay the whole matter before the Provincial of the Order. He was at first in favour of the project, but later, on account of the great opposition on all sides, changed his mind and decided that the monastery should not be built.<sup>1</sup> This occurred on the day before the papers were to be signed, and her confessor told her to think no more about it. To quote St. Teresa's own words: "I gave up our design with much readiness and joy, as if it cost me nothing. No one could believe it, not even those men of prayer with whom I conversed: for they thought I was exceedingly pained and sorry: even my confessor himself could hardly believe it. . . . And so I remained in the house where I was, exceedingly happy and joyful; though at the same time I was never able to give up my conviction that the work would be done. I had now no means of doing it, nor did I know how or when it would be done; but I firmly believed in its accomplishment."<sup>2</sup> Some months afterwards she returned to the charge, and suggested to her confessor and the father-rector "many reasons and considerations why they should not stand in my way. Some of these reasons made them afraid, for the father-rector never had a doubt of its being the work of the Spirit of God. . . . At last, after much consideration, they did not dare to hinder me."<sup>3</sup> Eventually the monastery was founded, two years after the original vision by which, in the mind of St. Teresa, it had been assured. In this case the conviction never flagged: the refusal of the Provincial to sanction the monastery resulted only in St. Teresa shelving the proposal for a short time, with the absolute certainty in her own mind that her idea would eventually be realized. She did not, as she was

<sup>1</sup> *Life of St. Teresa*, chap. xxxii, secs. 14-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xxxiii, secs. 1, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 12.

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directed to do by her confessor, put the whole matter away from her finally, but after an interval insisted again on its necessity with arguments of such cogency that both the confessor himself and the father-rector gave way.

With these facts the opinions of St. Teresa on her own attitude of obedience, as handed down to the present day in the carefully edited editions of her autobiography, stand in some contrast. With regard to her confessor she claims on two occasions that she is obedient to him, however imperfectly, and says that if he commanded anything and she left it undone she would think herself grievously deluded.<sup>1</sup> Though she should certainly believe a prayer to be from God, she says that she would never do anything for any consideration whatever, that was not judged by him who had the charge of her soul to be for the better service of our Lord.<sup>2</sup> It is noticeable that St. Teresa's method was not to accept a confessor who was antagonistic to the way of prayer she felt to be God-given, but to persevere until she found one who expressed his approval of its main points. In such circumstances her obedience is easier to understand, for if she were in agreement with her confessor on the general attitude, it would be natural for her to follow his directions in the details. And further, in a *Relation* written some fourteen years after the foundation of the monastery of St. Joseph, St. Teresa says that she never undertook anything merely because it came to her in prayer: on the contrary, when her confessors bade her to do the reverse, she did so without being in the least troubled thereat.<sup>3</sup> In the passage in the autobiography which refers to the foundation, the saint goes only to the length of saying that if a certain very learned Dominican had told her that she could not go on without offending God and going against her own conscience, she *believes* she would have

<sup>1</sup> *Life of St. Teresa*, chap. xxiii, sec. 19; *Rel.*, i, sec. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Rel.*, i, sec. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *Rel.*, vii, sec. 15.

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given it up, and looked out for some other way, but that she was shown no other way.<sup>1</sup> If these statements be in fact the unedited opinions of St. Teresa, the only conclusion possible is that she was so imbued with the idea of obedience that she did not recognize her occasional but inevitable departure therefrom at certain times. It is evident that they do not tally with the facts of her life, and it is not impossible that her carefully nurtured desire for obedience blinded her to the fact that in obeying her divinely received impulses she was acting in a way which was above any authority. Such action would be in accordance with an instinctive or, rather, an intuitive necessity of her very being—the force of the spirit cleaving through any and every obstacle and beyond the limits of any authority, straight to its end. For when man is identified with the indwelling spirit and speaks in that spirit's name, the moment for his obedience is past, and his is then the final and irresistible authority. And in words which bear all the impress of her indomitable certainty that her convictions were of God and her communing with Him, and therefore not to be gainsaid, St. Teresa writes of her desire for a monastery founded in poverty: "I found scarcely anyone of this opinion—neither my confessor, nor the learned men to whom I spoke of it. They gave me so many reasons the other way that I did not know what to do. But when I saw what the rule required, and that poverty was the more perfect way, I could not persuade myself to allow an endowment. And though they did persuade me now and then that they were right, yet, when I returned to my prayer, and saw Christ on the Cross, I could not bear to be rich."<sup>2</sup> Her practical answer to a Dominican who sent her two sheets of objections and theology against her plan was that she did not want any theology to help her to

<sup>1</sup> *Life of St. Teresa*, chap. xxxii, sec. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xxxv, sec. 4.

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escape from her vow of poverty and the perfect observance of the counsels of Christ, and that therefore she did not thank him for his learning.<sup>1</sup> And of her way of prayer: "When I am in prayer, and during those days when I am in repose, and my thoughts fixed on God, if all the learned and holy men of the world came together and put me to all conceivable tortures, and I, too, desirous of agreeing with them, they could not make me believe that this is the work of Satan, for I cannot. And when they would have had me believe it, I was afraid, seeing who it was that said so; and I thought that they must be saying what was true, and that I, being what I was, must have been deluded. But all they had said to me was destroyed by the first word, or recollection, or vision that came, and I was able to resist no longer, and believed it was from God."<sup>2</sup>

So much of an orthodox mystic of the Roman Church on the question of a hypothetical collision with the Inquisition, and of her certainty in the face of authoritative contradiction.

It must be a hard saying for the Church, that the kingdom of heaven is within, for she would have it believed, rather, that that kingdom is in her own keeping. The keys of heaven and of hell are her sceptre, and for the mystic who claims that the sceptre is finally in the hands of God and of himself at his highest she reserves a variety of fates, which in general fall under three heads.

She may, in the first place, ignore him if he or the school which he represents are of so little importance for one reason or another as to be unlikely to attract the attention of the faithful. Insignificance is a natural title to liberty of action.

Secondly, she may use the method of suppression, as she did (for example) in the case of the Quietists during the

<sup>1</sup> *Life of St. Teresa*, chap. xxxv, sec. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Rel.*, i, sec. 28.



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second half of the seventeenth century. Molinos was imprisoned, Madame Guyon followed him a few years later, and the movement, as a movement in any case, was successfully stamped out.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, where a mystic or a school of mystical teaching is too influential to ignore, and for any reason too valuable to suppress, recourse is inevitably had to the method of adoption or assimilation. But however she may adopt, or however strenuously she may try to assimilate them, the Church never has the air of being quite comfortable in her treatment of the mystics. Their essential independence is a source of perpetual uneasiness to her; their habit of dealing with the most solemn official pronouncements as though there were some higher court of appeal behind them, invests them with a certain character of irresponsibility in her eyes, and gives rise to a feeling that their occasional value is very nearly balanced by their continual danger. They are to her excellent servants but terribly exacting masters, and her fear of their mastery is as great as her pleasure in their service. There is, moreover, a certain recklessness in the matter of theological geography, a disquieting readiness to accept the truth from whatever sources and in whatever region it may be discovered, and all of these characteristics combine to result in the mystic being regarded as an *enfant terrible* over whom a very strict watch must be kept. He is included in the circle of the Church's approbation on the condition of his submission

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note, in connection with what has been said above as to the mystic's attitude towards obedience to the Church, that Molinos was far from disparaging obedience. On the contrary, he insisted on the necessity for it, and himself submitted to the Church in spite of his conviction that he was not mistaken in his teachings. "Goodbye, Father," he said to the Dominican who went with him to his prison, "we shall meet again on Judgment Day, and then it will be seen if the truth was on your side or on mine." See *The Spiritual Guide*, Introduction by K. Lyttleton, pp. 15, 18.



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being more in evidence than his independence; of his character as an obedient child being more obvious than his character as a God-guided mystic; and, in some cases, more particularly on condition of his force and example being required to withstand some growing and undesirable tendency within the Church. St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross fulfilled the first of these conditions, and coincided very aptly with a need of the Church for some such demonstration of apparent (and to a large extent very real) submission, combined with an activity in the matter of reform which went far to answer the objections of the then growing Protestantism on the score of luxury. It is difficult to regard the activities and the sum of spiritual and reforming endeavour of these two saints as "all part of the campaign against Protestantism," or to agree that "they were before all things champions of the Counter-Reformation,"<sup>1</sup> but it can hardly be doubted that while they were concerned with the great mystical facts and the need of these being known more widely and followed after more strenuously, the Church on her part was moved to accept them by a recognition of their extreme utility in the crisis of the moment. The searchings of heart which may have preceded such acceptance are suggested by the fact that St. Teresa was nearly, or perhaps actually, put into the convent prison on more than one occasion,<sup>2</sup> and St. John certainly incarcerated for more than eight months at Toledo;<sup>3</sup> while the similarity between certain aspects of St. Teresa's teaching and that of the subsequently condemned Quietists is so great that one non-Catholic writer

<sup>1</sup> Dean Inge, perhaps naturally, takes this view in his *Christian Mysticism*, second edition, Lecture V, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> See *Life of St. Teresa*, by herself, chap. xxxiii, sec. 2, and chap. xxxvi, sec. 11, note 21, in the 1911 edition of the Very Rev. Benedict Zimmerman, O.C.D.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, prefatory essay by the Very Rev. B. Zimmerman, O.C.D., in the 1906 edition, p. 11.

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has concluded that her teaching about passivity and the prayer of quiet is identical with that of Molinos,<sup>1</sup> and another that she was the real author of Quietist mysticism.<sup>2</sup>

However this may be, the Church has formulated a body of rules for mysticism which are intended to keep it under the strictest control and prevent it wandering outside the boundaries of orthodoxy. They include detailed instruction on the smallest points of the mystic life, on the desirable attitude in the face of any conceivable circumstances, and the method of distinguishing between intimations which may safely be regarded as divine and those which should be unhesitatingly put aside. The final criterion in all cases of doubt is that of their orthodoxy, so that anything which is against the Church's teaching must unquestionably be regarded as delusive, while everything which corroborates her teaching may safely be regarded as coming direct from God.<sup>3</sup> It is difficult not to see in such a standpoint a greater desire for the safety of the Church as an institution than for the truth in any or all of its aspects, and difficult accordingly to avoid the conclusion that the mystical theology of the Roman Church is aimed at limiting mysticism in all the spheres of its activity, and so denying it the freedom which is of its essence. But, as has been seen, it is not always successful in this endeavour because the mystic at the highest points of his life is under no authority but that of God. At the bottom of the Church's timidity of mysticism it can scarcely be doubted that there lies the realization that the logical outcome of it would be to do away with her *raison d'être*, however much emphasis might be laid on the value of her sacraments by mystics who were also Catholics. And just inasmuch as

<sup>1</sup> W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, second edition, Lecture V, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> K. Lyttleton, Introduction to *The Spiritual Guide*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g., A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, chap. xxii, sec. 33.

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the claim to experience actual communion with God is singularly liable to abuse, just because it is difficult to decide from without whether such communion has been enjoyed or not, and because it is a claim very likely to be made in a variety of cases where it has never occurred, the strictness of the Church in regulating the activities and expression of her mystics is not only natural but desirable. But for it delusion would occur in more cases than it does at present, where actual deceit did not; any unwillingness to fulfil a duty could be backed up with a possibly apocryphal divine communication, and—what would be the most undesirable result of all—the personal will would stand in great danger of being developed instead of annihilated. It is just because mysticism is peculiarly open to these and similar abuses that the control of the Church is of such value; but in guarding against imitations of true mysticism she has so narrowed her field that a great deal of what is unquestionably true must remain outside, and of those who are within her limits a certain number must suffer the fate of Molinos. Those who remain will be her highest and her most dangerous possession, inasmuch as at the most vital moments of their lives they sweep aside all mediation and bow their will to no representative on earth, but to the God Whom they have learned to know within the sanctuary of themselves.



## Chapter Four

**T**HE PRINCIPLES OF OBEDIENCE, POVERTY, and chastity were the foundations of St. Francis' life, both interior and exterior. They were not incumbent on him as a consequence of his ordination to the diaconate, for they are not part of the dedication even of full priesthood as such, but reserved for those who expressly embrace the monastic life; but there is no question as to his having recognized their supreme importance as aids to self-annihilation. To be literally correct, they are not so much aids to this as subdivisions of it: they do not only make for it, but in their full observance accomplish it. To be utterly obedient, contentedly poor, and universally chaste is to leave no part of the lower self in activity, which may clamour for its own needs or insist on its separateness from the contrasted world. That St. Francis succeeded in effecting such an annihilation will not be questioned by anyone conversant with the main facts of his life: it is the negative side which made possible his final free and full communion with God. The three principles were for him the conditions of spiritual progress, and inasmuch as such progress was the purpose of his foundation of the Order of the Lesser Brethren, he enjoined the virtues of obedience, poverty, and chastity at the beginning of both the First and Second Rules. They stand, therefore, as the beginning and the first step of the Franciscan life: "The Rule and life of these brothers is this: namely, to live in obedience and chastity, and without property."<sup>1</sup> It will be necessary, therefore, in this and

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 32. The same words occur in the first chapter of the Second Rule, *ibid.*, p. 64.

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subsequent chapters to inquire what interpretation St. Francis placed on this branch of his teaching. And, for the moment, of his conception of obedience and the renunciation of the personal will implied thereby.

St. Francis was nothing if not thorough. Obedience was to him not a thing to be trifled with, but a matter of the first importance, and his attitude with regard to it is characterized by the directness and whole-heartedness which he showed on all the critical questions of his life. It has been suggested that his idea of it was drawn from the romances of chivalry which had so great a vogue in Italy in his time and played so large a part in forming his method of expression.<sup>1</sup> The Provençal origin of his mother helped without question to give his mind a turn in the direction of romance, and the vigour of his poetic temperament hailed with delight the setting of pageantry and splendour of the tales of chivalry; but it is probable that his view of obedience was founded on something deeper and more profoundly fundamental than the conception of the fealty of knighthood. The thoroughness of his obedience and the trenchancy of his teaching thereon suggest the clear conviction of the mystic whose sole purpose is to order his life in such a manner that it may lead him to the sight and the knowledge of God, and it seems truer to say that he vitalized the conceptions of chivalry than that he drew from them his own attitude. The terms of chivalry, in a word, are the dress in which he clothed his convictions and aspirations, rather than the source from which they came.

The necessity for the complete annihilation of the personal will finds its extreme expression in a conversation with some of the brethren, which it is difficult to place in point of time. St. Francis was lamenting the fact that

<sup>1</sup> Father Cuthbert, *Life of St. Francis*, p. 204.





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perfect obedience to their Superior was rare among Religious, and on being asked in what the perfect and supreme obedience consisted, answered: "† Take a corpse, and put it where you please, you will see that it does not resist being moved, grumbles not at its position, and if let alone, does not cry out. If it be placed on a throne it will look, not above, but beneath; if arrayed in purple its pallor will be doubled. This is the truly obedient man; he discusses not wherefore he is moved, cares not where he is placed, does not press to be transferred elsewhere. When raised to office he keeps his wonted humility; the more he is honoured, the more unworthy he deems himself to be."<sup>1</sup> His latest biographer places this conversation at the period when St. Francis was greatly distressed by the troubles threatening the Order, and gave way to despondency as to its future. He sees in it the lack of that note of jubilancy in self-submission which was normal to St. Francis, and considers that undue emphasis is laid on the submission rather than on the charity which impels thereto.<sup>2</sup> It may well be that the darkness of the horizon at the moment caused a certain sombreness of expression on the part of St. Francis, but the teaching is paralleled on another occasion when he would appear rather to be clothed with his customary joyfulness. At the end of the "Salutation of the Virtues," in which he treats first of poverty and love and their effects on those who follow them, he writes: "Holy obedience confounds all bodily and fleshly desires and keeps the body mortified to the obedience of the spirit and to the obedience of one's brother and makes a man subject to all men of this world and not to men alone, but also to all beasts and wild animals, so that they may do with him whatsoever they will, in so far as it may be granted

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 152. Cf. *Mirror*, xlvi; Bonaventure, vi, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Father Cuthbert, *Life of St. Francis*, pp. 310, 311. M. Sabatier takes a similar view (*Vie*, chap. xv, pp. 298-301).

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to them from above by the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Another biographer sees in this a conception of obedience which is almost Buddhist in character, but recognizes that it was not the result of a passing fancy, but expressive of the attitude of St. Francis on many occasions of his life.<sup>2</sup>

But instead of regarding his views as drawing from chivalry, or being comparable to Buddhism, is it not possible that they are simply Christian, and of that essential Christianity which is mystical? Have these pronouncements, in fact, anything in their implications which is not presupposed by the doctrine of self-annihilation? The comparison of the perfectly obedient man to a dead body portrays a condition in which the personal will is utterly and finally destroyed; and in which, therefore, evil treatment and good are received with an equal mind simply because nothing is left in which the tendency to resentment may exist. For to resent a thing is to insist on separateness, and to insist on separateness is to increase it, and to increase it is to build fortifications and a barrier against God.

It is evident that this extreme of obedience is on the negative side of spiritual progress. It is the destruction of the personal will in preparation for the final state in which the activity is the activity of God, and man is, as it were, galvanized into movement by the will that is universal. Its value is not in itself, but in that obedience to the spirit in which St. Francis claims that holy obedience will result.

The vital point of obedience from the side of spiritual training was to St. Francis that in fulfilling the command of a Superior there should be no suggestion of a brother doing also his own will. From the point of view of the regulation of a community it is evident that it is of little moment whether the members obey their Superior because

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Joergensen, *St. François d'Assise*, book iv, chap. iii, p. 426.

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they will what he wills, or because they subject their wills to his in all cases—the advantage is on the whole on the side of similarity of desire in that it promotes smoothness of working—but from the point of view of self-annihilation it is equally evident that little progress is made by fulfilling under obedience a personal desire. It is an impertinence to say “Thy will be done,” to either God or man, when our own will approves the action. The whole purpose of obedience is to do violence to the limited will, and it is far from impossible for that will to contribute towards the intensification of its own self-satisfaction by the pride it takes in pretending to do under obedience, what, in fact, it does as the result of its own prompting. Commands issued on request were therefore distinguished by St. Francis from obediences properly so called: the first he very fittingly spoke of as licences, and reserved the name of obedience for those which were enjoined without any previous demand. He saw, moreover, one kind of obedience which was typical of all that was valuable, in the desire to preach among the infidels and run the risk of martyrdom thereby. In it he recognized that flesh and blood—the self-centred part—had no lot, and he was not only willing, but anxious, that the brethren should ask for this obedience. In such a desire for self-sacrifice he saw that at any rate the baser kind of self-seeking did not enter.<sup>1</sup>

It has been already noticed that St. Francis recognized the danger of appropriating goodness to a self which is by its nature incapable of producing it,<sup>2</sup> and in such appropriation lay for him the essence of self will. Referring to the account in Genesis of the apple of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he wrote: “Adam therefore might eat of every tree of paradise and so long as he did not offend against obedience he did not sin. For one eats of the tree

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 152; *Mirror*, xlviil.

<sup>2</sup> See above, chap. ii.



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of knowledge of good who appropriates to himself his own will and prides himself upon the goods which the Lord publishes and works in him, and thus, through the suggestion of the devil and transgression of the commandment, he finds the apple of the knowledge of evil.”<sup>1</sup> It is clear enough that in this saying St. Francis recognized, and laid emphasis on, the difference between the will in its natural state and in a condition of sanctification. He avoided the pitfall of loose thinking wherein resides the conclusion that it is the will in itself that is evil, and the will therefore that is to be destroyed; it was for him the will in so far as it was identified with the lower self-centred part which was undesirable, and therefore to be replaced by an identification of the will with that element in man which is divine. It was not the fact of willing that he deprecated, but a will unsanctified by dedication. For on the will as the force and motive power of man depends all his hope; his salvation is in its right direction towards the universality of God, and what measure of damnation is possible in its direction towards his own personal ends. It is, in the words of St. Francis, the tree of the knowledge of good, but in appropriating it to the lower self is “the apple of the knowledge of evil.” He regarded it, it would seem, as capable of all good but subject to misuse, and in its prostitution to inferior uses was the root of sin. For obedience is ultimately to God alone.

This point of view recurs continually, in that it is the final answer to every impulse towards self-praise. In his instructions to the brethren on preaching, which were incorporated in the First Rule, he reminds them that they must refer all good to God: “let us acknowledge that all good belongs to Him, and let us give thanks for all to Him from whom all good proceeds.”<sup>2</sup> And the *Fioretti* recount that

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 8, Admonition 2.

<sup>2</sup> First Rule, chap. xvii (*Writings*, p. 52).

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he explained to Brother Masseo that his own inadequacy and worthlessness rendered him a particularly apt instrument for his work, inasmuch as no one could possibly imagine that a man such as he was capable of effecting good by his own power. He was chosen to the end that the world "may know that every virtue and every good thing is of Him and not of the creature,"<sup>1</sup> and it was in the vivid realization of this that was founded St. Francis' sincere humility. He did not merely aim at humility as a means, but finally discovered it to be an inevitable end—the only attitude compatible with the truth—by his experience of the Spirit of God.<sup>2</sup>

To seek approval or congratulation or even gratitude, is, therefore, to lay the emphasis on that which is separated and apart from those who accord them, rather than on that which is one with them essentially and for ever. For this reason St. Francis, when discussing the attitude of the Lesser Brethren to their Ministers, reminded them that for God they had renounced their own will, and obedience to their Superiors was one manner in which they could show that such a renunciation was sincere.<sup>3</sup> But for the intense and enthusiastic nature of St. Francis it was not sufficient to obey only the express commands of the Superior. To do what was commanded was a necessity, but to await its expression in the form of a direct injunction savoured too greatly of the formalism which he always dreaded, to satisfy him completely. For him any occasion to subject

<sup>1</sup> *Little Flowers*, x.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to compare with this recognition of the indwelling God as the doer of all good, the passages from Lady Julian where she says that "each kind compassion that man hath on his even-Christians with charity, it is Christ in him," and that Christ "is nearest and meekest, highest and lowest, and doeth all. And not only all that we need, but also He doeth all that is worshipful, to our joy in heaven." (*Revelations of Divine Love*, chaps. xxviii and lxxx).

<sup>3</sup> Second Rule of the Friars Minor, chap. 10 (*Writings*, p. 72).

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the personal will to that of another was to be hailed as an opportunity to wrench the will away from its servitude to the ends of division—as a practice, if as nothing more. It is recorded, therefore, that “if a subject brother should not only hear the voice of a superior brother but should understand his will, he ought forthwith to concentrate himself wholly on obedience and do what he understands by any sign to be the superior’s will.”<sup>1</sup>

The principle of subjection was not only the subject of his teaching to the brethren, but was followed by St. Francis in his own case. It is not entirely impossible that the renunciation of the leadership of his Order was in some degree prompted by the desire to school himself into complete obedience, and give to the brethren at large an example of absolute willingness to serve rather than command. This was not, it is evident, the sole reason for his resignation, but it may well have entered into his consideration of the question. It occurred at the Michaelmas Chapter of 1220,<sup>2</sup> a few months after his return from the Holy Land. During his journey there the Order had begun to lose its primitive harmony, and the two Vicars left behind by St. Francis had been interfering with the wise simplicity of the Rule. A discontented brother had collected round him a body of similarly dissatisfied brethren, and had even gone to the length of attempting to get from the Pope an approval for a Rule for his sect.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these troubles, and to the fact that St. Francis never considered himself in the light of an organizer,<sup>4</sup> his eyes

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 45.

<sup>2</sup> Joergensen, *St. François d'Assise*, book iii, chap. viii, p. 314; Sabatier, *Vie de St. François*, chap. xiv, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup> Joergensen, *op. cit.*, book iii, chap. vii, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup> Sabatier, *op. cit.*, chap. xiv, p. 281. Cf. L. L. Dubois, S.M., *St. Francis of Assisi, Social Reformer*, New York, 1906, pp. 116 *et seq.*

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were causing him great trouble;<sup>1</sup> and this accumulation of disasters inclined him to the conclusion that on all grounds it was desirable that he should resign. But the resignation once accomplished, St. Francis' recognition of the desirability of having someone to whom he could subject his own will caused him to ask the newly appointed Minister General to apportion to him someone whom he could obey directly in his place. He had previously promised obedience to the Minister General as the ruler of the Order, but he seems to have considered that a more immediate obedience was necessary. "I ask thee for God's sake," he said, therefore, to Peter Cathanii, whom he had just appointed, "to entrust thy charge concerning me to one of my companions, to whom, as to thyself, I may yield reverent obedience. I know the fruit of obedience and I know that to one who has put his neck under the yoke of another, no time passes without gain." In his view of obedience the merit did not lie in the virtue or wisdom of him to whom the obedience was given, but simply in the fact of giving it: "Among other things which God's mercy has deigned to grant me, it has bestowed on me this grace, that I would obey a novice of an hour's standing, were he assigned to me as warden, as carefully as I would any one however ancient or discreet. A subject ought to consider his Superior not as a man, but as Him for whose sake he is in subjection; and the more contemptible the ruler, the more pleasing the humility of the subject who obeys."<sup>2</sup>

Side by side with this insistence on obedience there are to be found, in St. Francis' life, evidences of a considerable independence. He does not appear as naturally submissive to authority or as having had any striking respect for what

<sup>1</sup> Joergensen, *op. cit.*, book iii, chap. viii, p. 314. Cf. *Mirror*, lxxi, for St. Francis' own account of the reasons for his resignation.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 151. Cf. *Mirror*, xlvi; *Legend*, xiv, 57; Bonaventure, vi, 4.

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authority commanded, as such, though he recognized the incidental value of obedience thereto. Above the authority of the Church he recognized a higher power—that of the convictions which he regarded as divinely implanted in himself—and the history of his relations with the Church is the history of a struggle between these two forces. It is useless, in face of the facts, to claim that “his obedience to authority, even on points where he thought his own views were preferable to those of authority, is one of the most striking and admirable characteristics of St. Francis’ character,” or to state that “the foundation of all his religious life was an absolute and unreserved submission to the Roman Church.”<sup>1</sup> Unreserved submission to the Church would mean a close adherence to all the Church’s institutions as such, an adherence which would be as complete in the details as on the larger questions, and would make any deviation therefrom an impossibility.

In this matter of detail there are certain incidents in St. Francis’ career which indicate some measure of carelessness on his part with respect to the meticulous submission with which he is occasionally credited. In themselves they do not suffice for proof in one direction rather than another, but they are unquestionably indicative of his attitude. It is reported of him that he would eat on fast-days so that the sick might not be ashamed to eat,<sup>2</sup> and it is clear that if an observance of the Church’s rules had been of the first importance to him, this would not have been possible. But his compassion was greater than his attention to ecclesiastical ordinances, and in the face of his love and his desire for even the physical welfare of his brethren those ordinances counted as nothing. His general attitude is also suggested by an incident which occurred at the Porti-

<sup>1</sup> See Joergensen, *St. François d’Assise*, Appendix I, p. 504, and book iii, chap. ii, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 175.



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uncula. It was part of the Rule on which St. Francis had decided that on entry to the Order a novice should give up all his money and start his new life possessing nothing whatsoever. On an occasion when the Portiuncula was crowded with brethren drawn from all parts of the country, it became evident to Peter Cathanii, who was then Vicar, that there would be a considerable deficiency even of the necessities with which to support them. He suggested, therefore, that St. Francis should allow some of the novices' property to be kept, and utilized for that and similar occasions. St. Francis, insistent as ever on a scrupulous observance of his rule of poverty, forbade it immediately, and suggested a substitute which would have been impossible for anyone to whom reverence for the details of observance were paramount. "Strip the Virgin's altar," he said, "and take away its various ornaments, since thou canst not help the needy in any other way. Believe me, she will be better pleased to have her Son's Gospel observed and her altar stripped, than to have the altar vested and her Son despoised."<sup>1</sup> And at another time, when an old woman, whose two sons were among the brethren, asked for alms and there was nothing left to give her, St. Francis told his Vicar to give her their only New Testament, for he was convinced that the gift of it would be more pleasing than the reading out of it.<sup>2</sup> As the brethren had at that time no breviary, the New Testament was the only book in which the lessons at Matins could be found, but it is every way characteristic of St. Francis that he was not deterred from an act of goodwill by any considerations of possible displeasure on the part of authority.

On the larger and more direct question of submission to the Church as such, his independence and originality are no less evident at certain times of his life. It would be

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 67 ; Bonaventure, vii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 91 ; *Mirror*, xxxviii.

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going against the facts to say that he was in a condition of open rebellion, and against the whole tendency of his life to deny that in the main he was obedient to its leading, but there were definite occasions on which he forced his own God-sent convictions on a very unwilling authority. The approval of the Primitive Rule that he wrote for the brethren is one of these. On his arrival at Rome with his few brethren St. Francis made his way in all innocence direct to the Pope, a proceeding which so scandalized the Vicar of Christ that he sent him away on the spot, and told him to go and roll in the dirt with the pigs.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat crestfallen at so unexpected a reception St. Francis went away, and shortly afterwards met the Bishop of Assisi, who was on a visit to the Papal Court. To him St. Francis unfolded his plan, and the Bishop, having some personal knowledge of him and a considerable faith in his sincerity, introduced him to an influential Cardinal, John of St. Paul. St. Francis therefore told his story over again, and explained his desire to lead a life of strict evangelical poverty and his wish to receive the approval of the Pope for his Rule. But the Cardinal demurred. He objected in the first place to the foundation of a new Order, and did his best to persuade St. Francis to enter one of the already existing monasteries. To this St. Francis answered that he did not propose either to become a hermit or to enter a monastery: his only purpose was to observe the Gospel as simply as possible. He was, as Celano says, "carried on by a still loftier desire." Failing to convince him of the desirability of conformity in this respect, the Cardinal suggested that the difficulty of the proposed Rule would be so great as to make it almost impossible of observance, and that it would be much better to mitigate it in various ways that he suggested. But to this suggestion, as to the former

<sup>1</sup> Cuthbert, *Life of St. Francis*, p. 81 and note.

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one, St. Francis showed an unchanging front—in face of the specific recommendation of one of the highest dignitaries of the Church he held to his conviction that the Rule he had proposed was the best, and that to enter a monastery would be to destroy its main purpose. This absolute and most unexpected firmness on the part of a humble suppliant ended by overcoming the Cardinal's objections, and he therefore recommended St. Francis and his followers to Pope Innocent III with considerable warmth of appreciation.

But the Pope in his turn raised practically the same objections as the Cardinal. The Rule was too severe—those who came after the immediate founders would be unable to bear it—human nature was frail and changeable, and the way of perfection was hard. St. Francis, however, replied to this with the same absolute faith and conviction with which he had replied to Cardinal John of St. Paul, with the result that he made sufficient impression on the Pope to ensure another interview shortly afterwards. In the meantime he prayed, and during his prayer there came to his mind the parable of the poor woman who was married to a great king, whose children were ultimately recognized and provided for by the king himself. On his return to the Pope he recounted the story, explaining that he was the poor woman and God the king, and adding his conviction that God would provide for the brethren in their poverty. Meanwhile, the Pope had had the dream which has been immortalized by Giotto on the walls of the Upper Church at Assisi, wherein he saw the Lateran on the point of falling and being held up by a small religious whom he afterwards recognized as St. Francis. The final result was that St. Francis carried the day—the simplicity of his immovable conviction prevailed against the arguments of the Pope and all his court, and he departed full of joy, with the papal benediction and authority to preach to the

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people.<sup>1</sup> Whatever were the final results of this approval, whether for the good or evil of the Franciscan movement as a whole, it was a clear victory for the conviction of the mystic as against the doubt, as also against the formalism, of the Church.

Another incident which is typical of this same liberty of view was in connection with the much discussed Indulgence of the Portiuncula. That the Indulgence was actually demanded by St. Francis is now accepted by all his latest biographers, and a vast amount of erudition has been expended to prove its authenticity.<sup>2</sup> The main features of the story are that in the summer of 1216—some six years after the approval of the Rule by Pope Innocent III—St. Francis had a vision during prayer, in which Christ directed him to demand from the Pope a plenary indulgence for all who should visit the Church of the Portiuncula. Filled with the impulse of this communication, firm in the certainty of its fulfilment, St. Francis went forthwith to Perugia to make his petition to the Pope. This time it was to Honorius III, then newly elected, that his application was made. The demand naturally amazed him: plenary indulgences were at that time reserved for the Crusaders, and the normal indulgence for a church was very much more restricted as to time. Moreover, St. Francis asked for the indulgence without making any offering on his own part, a fact which was not calculated to hasten the papal consent. Honorius therefore objected. St. Francis insisted: he explained that he did not want an indulgence for so many years, that he was not concerned with years,

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 32-3; *Legend*, xii, 47-52; Bonaventure, iii, 9-10. See also Cuthbert, *Life*, pp. 81-5; Joergensen, *St. François*, book ii, chap. ii, pp. 121-33; Sabatier, *Vie*, chap. vi, pp. 107-16.

<sup>2</sup> See Sabatier, *Un nouveau Chapitre de la Vie de St. François*; Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. iii, and Appendix I; Cuthbert, *Life*, book ii, chap. vii, and Appendix II. At the end of this appendix is a bibliography of the chief writings on the subject.



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but with souls; that he desired that whoever should come to the Church, "confessed and contrite and absolved by a priest, should be freed from all guilt and penalty both in heaven and on earth, from the day of their baptism till the hour of their entry into this church." The Pope objected again that he was asking too much, and that it was not the custom of the Church to grant such an indulgence. Then the answer came, sharp and decisive—the words of the mystic who is without fear or hesitation because he knows that his commission is from God—"My Lord, what I ask is not from myself but from Him Who sent me, the Lord Jesus Christ." And to St. Francis speaking in the name of all that was highest in himself, and in the conviction of his message's divinity, Honorius bowed as Innocent had bowed before him, and as all authority must bow now and for ever to the ultimate authority of the spirit. "It is my will that you have what you seek," he said twice over, and the influence of all his court could not cause him to revoke his word. The cardinals, realizing that such an indulgence would go far to nullify the effect of the indulgence granted to those who should go on the Crusades, used all their power to secure its revocation, but only succeeded in persuading Honorius to restrict it to one day in every year, and that the day of the dedication of the Church.<sup>1</sup> It seems probable that it was due also to the efforts of the cardinals and the clergy in general that the news of the Indulgence was kept practically unknown for so many years that its authenticity has since been doubted. But the amazing request was granted against all precedent; and thus in the face of the express unwillingness of the Pope himself, and in defiance of the advice of the whole College of Cardinals and the wishes of the priesthood in every part, St. Francis gained his point. He had no power to enforce his demand,

<sup>1</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 193, and *Legend*, xix, 74.



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there was no sanction whatever on which to fall back: he triumphed by the sheer force of his conviction that the impulse that had come to him as a vision was really divine. Is it possible, in the face of his opposition to and his conquest over two successive Popes, to maintain that "his submission is one of his most striking and admirable characteristics"?

But it cannot be claimed, on the other hand, that St. Francis was invariably successful in his struggle against the formalism and the opportunism of authority. His fight for the observance of strict poverty is a matter of common knowledge to those in any degree acquainted with his life, as is the result in which the Church succeeded in so distorting his conception of it as to rob it of its chief purpose. The Hugolin Rule for the Poor Ladies may stand as an example. Cardinal Hugolin, afterwards Pope Gregory IX, drew up a constitution for the followers of St. Clare, during St. Francis' absence in the East, in which the Franciscan ideal of poverty was practically disregarded. Property was allowed, the freedom of life gave place to rigid ordinances of "perpetual abstinence, continual silence, and the law of enclosure," and the Constitutions tried "to capture the new religious enthusiasm evoked by Francis and to fasten it within the closest bonds of traditional asceticism."<sup>1</sup> In the case of San Damiano, the home of St. Clare and of the original Poor Ladies, St. Francis took over the guidance of the sisters on his return from the Holy Land, and so secured to them the privilege of literal poverty; but in the case of the many other communities the Hugolin Constitutions obtained until shortly after St. Clare's death. Ultimately she, too, triumphed over the Pope, but it was not till twenty-four years after the death of St. Francis.<sup>2</sup> The Second Rule of the Friars Minor is a further case where the dearest wishes of St. Francis were

<sup>1</sup> Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-7, 245-8.

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ignored, and he was forced by his advisers to omit what was to him the foundation of his whole position. "Take nothing for your journey, neither staff nor scrip nor bread nor money": this had been the distinctive mark of all his attitude, and yet it was allowed no place in the Second Rule which was to go down to posterity as representing the final wishes of the Saint.<sup>1</sup>

But beside the fact of St. Francis having forced his convictions on authority on the one hand, and on the other of his having been unwillingly compelled to cede to authority in the long run some of his most precious conceptions, there is the fact that some six years before his death he committed his Order to the care of the Church. It may seem that such an action is evidence of a reverence for authority as such—a feeling that, at the last, submission to the Church is a necessary proceeding even on the part of a reformer, if he be in fact a member of it—but in the present case St. Francis' action seems to have been prompted by other considerations. He had just returned from the Holy Land and found the Order in a chaotic condition of difference; divisions were arising among the brethren, and the Rule he had left behind him had been seriously tampered with by the Vicars. His mind, therefore, naturally turned in search of some means of organizing more effectively the ever-increasing body of the brethren, and with an equal naturalness he concluded that the Church was the obvious authority to which to apply. He saw himself as a small black hen surrounded by innumerable chickens that sought refuge under her wings, and because of her own lack of strength she could not protect them. He therefore decided, as Celano expresses it, to "go and commend them to the holy Church of Rome, that by the rod of her power

<sup>1</sup> See Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. xii, pp. 374-8; Cuthbert, *Life*, pp. 322-4. Cf. Sabatier, *Vie*, chap. xv, for a discussion of the extent to which the Second Rule fell short of St. Francis' wishes.

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the ill-disposed may be smitten and the children of God enjoy full freedom everywhere, to the increase of eternal salvation." St. Francis was not therefore actuated by any particular impulse to conformity, but by the desire to gain the Church's protection so that the brethren might observe their Gospel rule simply and without interference. This, as Celano observes, "was the whole intention of the Saint of God when he determined so to commend himself. These were the holy teachings of the man of God's foresight concerning the necessity for such a measure against the time to come."<sup>1</sup> He asked, and obtained, Cardinal Hugolin as Protector, as a special Pope to whom access would always be possible for the humblest of the brethren; but how far he was justified in his belief that such a move would enable the brethren to keep the Rule in its original simplicity is shown by the distortion of his wishes in the Second Rule.<sup>2</sup> His idea of the Church in its relation to the Order was that it should be protective and executive: apart from such action St. Francis protested continually against the unnecessary use of authority.

It is not difficult to conceive his views on this question. He had quite definitely taken the life of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels as the model on which he desired to form his own life, and even when the interpolations of pious biographers have been duly discounted (as, for instance, his birth in a stable and the episode with the pilgrim who represents the Simeon of the Gospel story<sup>3</sup>) the fact remains that the tenor of his life was strikingly similar to that of Christ.<sup>4</sup> He had that childlike directness and that amazing

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 24-5; *Mirror*, lxxviii; *Legend*, xvi, 63-5.

<sup>2</sup> See Joergensen and Sabatier, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> See Joergensen, *St. François*, book i, chap. ii, pp. 11-13.

<sup>4</sup> The *Liber Conformitatum* of Bartholomew of Pisa is entirely concerned with tracing resemblances between the life of St. Francis and that of Christ.

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spiritual sincerity which can effect more than all the authority in the world, and it was his firm conviction that to gain influence in high places was of less value than to give these qualities free play in working for the spiritual betterment of mankind. The whole of his struggle against absorption by authority was the struggle of a man persuaded that by suffering with gratitude and patience whatever might arrive, he could do more than by utilizing the contrivances of diplomacy and power. It was in the humility of Christ put into action that he placed his trust—the humility which is founded on an almost superhuman strength because it is rooted in an almost superhuman degree of love and faith. To suffer joyfully whatever may arrive is prime evidence of such a love, and it is by a life founded thereon that the dulled and careworn hearts of men are touched to admiration and hope. In the case of St. Francis his passionate desire was to fulfil literally the precepts of humility and long-suffering, for he seems to have had that literalness which is often found in company with a vivid poetical imagination. But authority, in the shape of the Church and those of the brethren who had seized his main idea with a less sympathetic comprehension than the rest, was for ever putting hindrances in the way of such a literalness. On the man who longed to face the world with no other protection than that of Christ, they forced the doubtful benefits of privileges and influence. Yet it was not without a passionate protest on the part of St. Francis.

On one occasion (it is suggested that it was after the unsuccessful first missionary journey to Germany<sup>1</sup>) some of the brethren were complaining that they were refused permission to preach by the bishops, and suggested that it would be better if St. Francis obtained a privilege from the Pope which would allow them complete freedom in this

<sup>1</sup> Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 243.



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respect. They pleaded that it would be really for the salvation of souls, but St. Francis would have none of it. "You, Friars Minor," he is reported as saying, "know not the will of God, and do not allow me to convert the whole world as God willeth. For I wish by perfect humility and reverence first to convert the prelates. Who, when they shall see our holy life and humble reverence towards them, shall beseech you to preach and convert the people, and they shall call them to the preaching better than your privileges which would lead you into pride. . . . But as for me, I desire this privilege from the Lord, that never may I have any privilege from man, except to do reverence to all, and to convert the world by obedience to the holy Rule rather by example than by word."<sup>1</sup>

But this notwithstanding, letters of commendation to the brethren were issued by the Pope in 1219, with the intention of gaining the protection of the bishops in the countries to which they might go, and in the following year another letter was sent to the French bishops, while it became customary for the cardinals to give letters on their own part to brethren going on missionary journeys.<sup>2</sup> But to the end St. Francis protested against a protection which was in effect an unwarranted interference with both the purpose and the method of the Lesser Brethren. The danger of it was present in his mind when he wrote his will, and his attitude is shown so clearly therein that it may be well to quote the passage verbatim. "I strictly enjoin by obedience on all the brothers that, wherever they may be, they should not dare, either themselves or by means of some interposed person, to ask any letter in the Roman curia either for a church or for any other place, nor under pretext of preaching, nor on account of their bodily persecution; but wherever they are not received let them flee to

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, l.

<sup>2</sup> Cuthbert, *Life*, pp. 242-4.



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another land to do penance, with the blessing of God.”<sup>1</sup> Such a categorical prohibition, enjoined as an obedience, which to St. Francis was always the most solemn form of injunction, leaves no room for doubt as to the dislike with which he regarded the growing tendency to substitute the authority of the Church for the living and vivid force of spiritual sincerity.

For the rest, St. Francis displayed throughout his whole life that independence with regard to authority as such which he had evinced in his dealing with Popes Innocent III and Honorius III. It is true that in the Second Rule he was not so successful as he had been on former occasions, and the Pope would not allow him to give the brethren permission to observe the Rule in its full literalness, even against the desires of the ministers. It was altered so that the liberty to observe the Rule literally rested with the ministers, and not with the subject, which was a conclusion in direct opposition to the wishes of St. Francis.<sup>2</sup> But it is admitted that this Rule was a distortion of the Franciscan ideals in the interests of ecclesiasticism: the free scope of that which had been inspired by the spirit gave way to the narrowing influence of the wisdom of this world: and there are more occasions than one on which St. Francis expressed his views with regard to the dues of authority. It would seem that the key to some of his apparently conflicting pronouncements on the subject is—as has been already suggested—the fact that obedience was to him a means of spiritual progress: he is not concerned with its value or desirability *per se* and as evidence of submission to the Church, but as a means to a vastly higher end.

In St. Francis' view the original Rule approached perfection as nearly as might be, as it was founded on and

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 323; Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. xii, pp. 371-3.

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drawn from the Gospels both in spirit and very often in word.<sup>1</sup> To him therefore the observance of it was the observance of a counsel more calculated to promote spiritual advance than any other which had been or could be imagined by man. He considered that it had been given to him by direct revelation without any human mediation,<sup>2</sup> and throughout all his life he believed that it contained the highest truths of the spiritual life. It was therefore paramount, and strict obedience to it could not result in formalism and spiritual death because it was instinct with the very message of life. It breathes the spirit of expansion and outgoing and love, and these things are the antithesis of the bondage of obedience for its own sake. The original Rule as approved by Innocent III suffered a variety of changes as time went on and the needs of the brethren differed, and the First Rule as it stands now comprises the original Rule together with the additions made to it on various occasions. The sources from which these additions came were chiefly decisions made at successive Chapters to meet necessities as they arose, and ideas which occurred to St. Francis as time passed.<sup>3</sup> It is then a composite document, but one which still represents the spirit of St. Francis with some vividness.

This spirit seems very evident in a passage where he exhorts the brethren "diligently to obey them [the ministers] in those things which look to the salvation of the soul and are not contrary to our life."<sup>4</sup> Here it is clear that obedience in itself is not that which is finally desirable, for liberty is given to the subject to disobey his minister, whoever he may be and of however high place, if he commands

<sup>1</sup> See Celano, i, 32.

<sup>2</sup> See his will (*Writings*, p. 83).

<sup>3</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, Appendix I, for a discussion and analysis of the First Rule, with suggestions as to those parts of it which are primitive. Cf. Paschal Robinson, *Writings of St. Francis*, pp. 25-31.

<sup>4</sup> First Rule, chap. iv (*Writings*, p. 36).

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anything which is "contrary to our life." The life here is the life of absolute simplicity and poverty, and adherence to it is placed higher than obedience. It will be remembered that it was just this liberty which was denied to the brethren in the Second Rule, much against the wishes of St. Francis: the value which he placed on it is shown by the frequency with which references to the same idea occur. In the fifth chapter of the First Rule he wrote: "if however one of the ministers should command some one of the brothers anything contrary to our life or against his soul, the brother is not bound to obey him, because that is not obedience in which a fault or sin is committed."<sup>1</sup> And again in one of the Admonitions he explained that if a subject simply considers that something would be better or more useful to his soul than what his Superior has commanded him, he is to sacrifice his will and fulfil the injunction of the Superior. But if the Superior should command anything that is actually against his soul, it is permissible for the subject to disobey, though he must not leave the Superior and must be ready to suffer persecution for his disobedience. The prospect which is held out to the subject is not, therefore, one calculated to inspire him with the idea of disobedience for the mere joy of it. A passing thought that he knows better than his Superior is insufficient as an excuse for disobeying him; it must be something which is actually against his own soul that is the only reason for revolt. "For there are many religious who, under pretext of seeing better things than those which their Superiors command, look back and return to the vomit of their own will. These are homicides and by their bad

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 37. Cf. Letter to All the Faithful (*ibid.*, p. 103). Father Cuthbert considers that both these chapters are later additions, probably of capitular origin. They are not for this reason less representative of the attitude of St. Francis, whose opinion would naturally carry the greatest weight in the meetings of the Chapters.

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example cause the loss of many souls.”<sup>1</sup> It is clear, then, that the personal will of the subject is not the criterion for obedience or the reverse, but “the life” as had been laid down in the original Rule. While St. Francis’ hands were free he would never allow an authority higher than that: the revelation of it which he considered had come to him placed it in a position where no human authority could reach it. His intention was to legislate for all time, whoever his successors might be—and yet it was not he who made the law, but Christ.<sup>2</sup>

It is, however, on the question of penance that the most amazing divergence appears to arise between the official attitude of the Church and that enjoined by St. Francis. The evidence for it rests upon a letter “To a certain Minister” (who, it is suggested, was Brother Elias), in which St. Francis speaks of a regulation he proposes to make at the coming Chapter. “If any brother, at the instigation of the enemy, sin mortally, let him be bound by obedience to have recourse to his guardian. And let all the brothers who know him to have sinned, not cause him shame or slander him, but let them have great mercy on him and keep very secret the sin of their brother, for they that are healthy need not a physician, but they that are ill. And let them be likewise bound by obedience to send him

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, pp. 8-9, Admonition 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. in this connection, *Mirror*, xi: “Yet often he used to say these words: ‘Woe to those friars who are contrary to me in this matter, which I firmly know to be the Will of God for the greater usefulness and necessity of the whole Order, though unwillingly I bend myself to their will.’ Whence often he used to say to us, his fellows: ‘Herein is my grief and my affliction; that in those things which with much labour of prayer and meditation I obtain of God through His mercy, for the benefit, present and future, of the whole Order, and which I am assured by Him are according to His will, some brethren by the authority of their knowledge and false foresight are against me and make them void, saying: “These things are to be held and observed, and these not,”’”

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to his custos with a companion. And let the custos himself care for him mercifully as he himself would wish to be cared for by others if he were in a like situation. And if he should fall into any venial sin, let him confess to his brother priest, and if there be no priest there let him confess to his brother until he shall find a priest who shall absolve him canonically, as has been said, and let them have absolutely no power of enjoining other penance, save only this: Go and sin no more.”<sup>1</sup> On the suggestion that this letter amounts to a disregard of the necessity of penance the Catholic Church is immediately up in arms. Its position, perhaps inevitably, is that which has been explained by a recent writer in a remark that “if ever the conduct or language of a saint seems to run counter to the Church which has canonized him, I am as sure of a faulty or incomplete text as I am of the infallibility of the Church.”<sup>2</sup> It is not improbable that the parallel is a just one, but it cannot be maintained that such an attitude makes for an unprejudiced view of the point in question.<sup>3</sup> When all the arguments have been considered it seems clear that the internal evidence is, on the whole, strongly in favour of a very definite and divergent attitude having been taken up by St. Francis, and—these apart—there are general reasons which predispose to the belief that St. Francis would not insist on the necessity of penance. Formed as was his whole life on the example of the Christ of the Gospels, it is almost inevitable that he should have conformed to that pattern, and wished others to conform to it no less, on one of its most striking points. He would naturally desire

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, pp. 123-4.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Montgomery Carmichael, in an article on the *Writings of St. Francis* (*The Month*, February 1904, p. 162).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the various arguments in connection with the question of penance see Appendix, where the subject is dealt with in detail.



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that the attitude of the brethren in the presence of sin should be as nearly as possible that which is recorded of Christ, and the literal simplicity of taking His actual words as the key to that attitude suggests, as nothing else could do, that he took them as applying to sin generally. His desire for conformity to his pattern would result in the words springing to his mind automatically when any question as to the proper treatment of sin was under consideration, and his whole life is evidence of the fact that he would not willingly let anything stand between him and the fulfilment of the Gospel precepts. Further, the use of the peculiar phrase, any "*other* penance save only this: go and sin no more," suggests that St. Francis realized that obedience to such an injunction constitutes in itself a very real penance. The strain and the effort required suddenly to break away from a course of sin, or of anything else, is of itself a penance, and it would have been repugnant to the whole tenor of St. Francis' life to import any idea of punishment where it was not absolutely necessary. Ultimately the doing of penance is an evidence of the sincerity of the intention to cease from sin, and the best evidence of such sincerity is precisely that cessation. When it is effected the only point of value has been gained, and any idea of subsequent punishment is indicative of that uninspired stupidity which has its source in vindictiveness.

The remark, therefore, that the desire to do away with penance is "so Franciscan," which has been received with contemptuous amusement by Catholic writers,<sup>1</sup> would seem to approach the truth as nearly as may be.

The attitude of St. Francis towards the priesthood of his time is one which has naturally given rise to some difference of opinion. There are passages in his history which would suggest that he had a blind reverence for the priest, simply

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Carmichael, for example, in the article already referred to, and Father Robinson, *Writings of St. Francis*, p. 120.

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because he was a priest and irrespective of all other considerations, as when he says: "Blessed is the servant of God who exhibits confidence in clerics who live uprightly according to the form of the holy Roman Church."<sup>1</sup> But as regards his actual submission to them, he felt that this should be limited in the same way that the submission of the subjects to their Superiors was to be limited. "Let us hold all Clerics and religious as our masters in those things which regard the salvation of our souls," he wrote in his First Rule, "if they do not deviate from our religion, and let us reverence their office and order and administration in the Lord."<sup>2</sup> This would seem to contain the germ of his whole attitude. As far as the priest ruled in accordance with what St. Francis himself felt was the essence of his religion, as contained in the Rule, obedience to them was to be absolute: beyond that it was to be remembered that "that is not obedience in which a fault or sin is committed." But at all times and in all cases the priest was to command reverence from the brethren, expressly on account of his office. As he says in the Admonition already quoted in this connection: "Woe to those who despise them: for even though they may be sinners, nevertheless no one ought to judge them, because the Lord Himself reserves to Himself alone the right of judging them. For as the administration with which they are charged, to wit, of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which they receive and which they alone administer to others—is greater than all others, even so the sin of those who offend against them is greater than any against all the other men in this world."<sup>3</sup>

There is no question, therefore, of St. Francis having placed the priesthood on a pedestal in the sense of regarding

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 18, Admonition 26.

<sup>2</sup> First Rule, chap. xix (*ibid.*, p. 53).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. Cf. The Letter to All the Faithful (*ibid.*, p. 102).

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the priest as immaculately incapable of evil doing—his veneration for him was based not on his function as priest in general, but as the administrator of the Sacrament. It is impossible not to see in this attitude a very striking distinction from the acceptance of and veneration for the priesthood on account merely of their position as representatives of the Church. In so far as they were the officers of a supreme authority it does not appear to have occurred to St. Francis to consider them with any particular respect, or to have looked up to them as masters or directors of the spiritual life. But in his appreciation of their office as those by means of whom it is possible to partake of the benediction of the Eucharist, is a point of view typical of the mystic. As all his view rests on the conviction that actual experience of God is alone supremely desirable, and as in the sacrifice of the Mass such a personal communion is in some measure brought directly within his reach, so it is that therein is to him all that is most valuable in the Church's ceremonial. And so clearly is this view of the priest, as the channel by which such benediction comes, the whole foundation of St. Francis' respect for the priesthood in general, that it will be worth while to give in full some further statements of his own thereon. In his will, which is the nearest approach to a spiritual autobiography that St. Francis left, he explains fully both his attitude and his reasons for it. "The Lord gave me, and gives me, so much faith in priests who live according to the form of the holy Roman Church, on account of their order, that if they should persecute me, I would have recourse to them. And if I had as much wisdom as Solomon had, and if I should find poor priests of this world (*i.e.*, secular priests) I would not preach against their will in the parishes in which they live. And I desire to fear, love, and honour them and all others as my masters; and I do not wish to consider sin in them, for in them I see the Son of God and they are my masters.

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And I do this because in this world, I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God Himself except His most holy Body and Blood, which they receive and they alone administer to others. And I will that these most holy mysteries be honoured and revered above all things, and that they be placed in precious places.”<sup>1</sup> So great was his reverence that he exhorted the brethren to bow before the priests and kiss their hands, and if they met them on horseback he would have them kiss even the hooves of the horses on which they rode; but the reason is again expressly given: because of the respect due to their office, and because they handled the reverend and highest Sacraments.<sup>2</sup>

Of a piece with this was his determination at one period of his life to send the brethren through the world with pyxes, so that the Host might be kept in a fit receptacle, and the statement attributed to him by Celano, that if he met at the same time a saint coming from heaven and any poor priest, he would honour the priest first, and tell the saint to wait, “for this man’s hands handle the Word of Life, and possess something that is more than human.”<sup>3</sup> He was also anxious to send brethren with wafer irons, so that good Hosts might be made in all the churches,<sup>4</sup> and would offer to penurious priests ornaments for their altars.<sup>5</sup> His reverence for the Eucharist was, in fact, as has been well said, the very soul of his piety, and the source of all his veneration for the priesthood. Such veneration was not founded on opportunism nor “counselled by ecclesiastical prudence”: the biographies which appear to portray most truly the essentially Franciscan spirit leave no room for the supposition that it derived from his orthodox submission to the hierarchy of the Church.<sup>6</sup> St. Francis’ own

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> *Legend*, xiv, 57.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, ii, 201.

<sup>4</sup> *Mirror*, lxxv.

<sup>5</sup> Bonaventure, i, 6.

<sup>6</sup> See Sabatier, *Opuscles de Critique Historique*, fasc. x, pp. 157-8 n. Cf. also the instruction “On reverence for the Lord’s Body and on the



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view of the relations he would have with the clergy is given with considerable clearness in more than one passage of his many biographies, and shows that by the side of his criticism of them and his realization of their shortcomings, was the definite desire to keep the peace with them. "Be subject to them who bear rule," Celano reports him as saying to the brethren, "that so much as in you lies no jealousy may spring up. If you are sons of peace, you shall win clergy and people to God, and this the Lord judges to be more acceptable than to scandalize the clergy and win the people only. Cover their lapses, supply their manifold defects, and when you have done so, be the more humble."<sup>1</sup> It was on this supply of the clergy's manifold defects that St. Francis considered his relation to them was founded: his ministry was to aid them in the work of salvation of souls, and he realized that it could be accomplished better when there was peace between the official shepherds and those who voluntarily gave their help, than when there was a state of feud.<sup>2</sup> Such a consideration may well have been in his mind when he included in the Second Rule the injunction that no brother should preach in the diocese of any bishop if such action should be opposed by him, but his own method of dealing with refractory bishops shows that he was not given to regarding their refusal as final. On one occasion the Bishop of Imola refused leave to preach in his diocese, on the pretext that it was quite enough for him to do that for his own people. This was as direct a refusal as it was possible to meet with, but St. Francis having bowed humbly and retired, returned in a short time and repeated his request as though the refusal had never been made. "When a father has driven a son

cleanliness of the Altar" (*Writings*, p. 23), and the First Admonition, "Of the Lord's Body" (*ibid.*, p. 5).

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 146. See *Mirror*, liv.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, *loc. cit.*; *Mirror*, x.



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out of one door he must come in again by another," were the words in which he suggested that he would not be finally repulsed by any number of refusals, and the bishop is reported very wisely to have given way before such insistence.<sup>1</sup>

But there was a side of St. Francis' character to which obedience to the Church was natural and desirable. As with St. Teresa, he was a member of the Roman Catholic Church as well as a mystic, and his innate sincerity led him to give that authority its due when it was possible to do so without hindrance to his convictions as a mystic. In dealing with a body for which strict submission is a condition of salvation it is always necessary to discount in some measure the official pronouncements of orthodox biographers with regard to the attitude of a famous subject, but even when due allowance has been made for interpolations and omissions due to a desire for edification, there remains in the case of St. Francis a considerable quantity of evidence of the high respect which he had for his Church. In considering this respect it must always be remembered that he made no attempt to give new doctrine to the world; in so far as he was a reformer he was concerned with life, and not with teaching, and he had therefore no inclination to interfere with the accepted dogmas. His genius was in his life, and his life therefore remains as his most precious heritage to mankind. "He had made a tongue of his whole body," as one of his early biographers graphically puts it,<sup>2</sup> and in his First Rule he directed the brethren to preach by their works, whether they were allowed by their minister to preach in any other manner or not.<sup>3</sup> The writer of *The Mirror of Perfection* witnesses that St. Francis' chief study was to teach the brethren by works rather than

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 97.

<sup>3</sup> First Rule, chap. xvii (*Writings*, p. 50).

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by words,<sup>1</sup> and there is no question as to his realization that a man's life will act as a reproof to evil doing as much as, if not more than, his preaching.<sup>2</sup> And when he gained from Innocent III his original permission to preach it is noticeable that the licence was to preach on moral questions, and not to concern himself with the Church's dogmas;<sup>3</sup> these he was willing to accept without further questioning. But while such an acquiescence suggests conformity, it also suggests that St. Francis had no very great concern with dogma as such: it does not, in fact, seem foreign to the spirit of his life to say that it appeared to him too remote from the immediate needs he saw before him to make it a matter demanding his attention. As a general thing he would seem to have accepted it as one accepts the air—as necessary and, on the whole, unnoticeable—and only to have concerned himself seriously with it when he felt it to be antagonistic to his ideals. The lightness and ease with which he put aside the dearest ecclesiastical doctrines in such a case has been seen in his attitude towards penance.

His conformity is chiefly evidenced in the Rules he drew up for the guidance of his brethren, and as the Rules as we have them were formally approved by the Church, it is not surprising that such a conformity is found in them. The statement that "no one shall be received contrary to the form and institution of the holy Church" appears in the First Rule,<sup>4</sup> as it now stands with the additions it received as time passed; but it does not appear possible of argument that such a statement formed part of the original Rule, for that is expressly stated to be the marrow of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> Later on in the same Rule he says that "all the brothers

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 103.

<sup>3</sup> See Joergensen, *St. François*, book ii, chap. ii, p. 140, note 2. See also book iii, chap. ii, p. 228; Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 85, note 2.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. ii. *Writings*, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> *Mirror*, lxxvi.

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shall be Catholics and live and speak in a Catholic manner. But if anyone should err from the Catholic faith and life in word or in deed, and will not amend, let him be altogether expelled from our fraternity.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, no brother is to “preach contrary to the form and institution of the holy Roman Church”;<sup>2</sup> in these and similar rulings St. Francis appears as the Catholic who accepts the institutions of his Church as the foundation of his Rule. There is in such an acceptance something suggestive of the conviction that in any church, as church, is to be found the material of salvation, and that it is safer for a man to remain in the beliefs in which he has been brought up, as long as he vitalizes them into vivid realities for himself, than to seek entirely new ground. Such a view was expressed hundreds of years later by Lopukhin,<sup>3</sup> and it is stated that St. Francis left, as one of his last counsels of perfection to the brethren, the recommendation “always to remain faithful subjects to the prelates and clergy of holy Mother Church.”<sup>4</sup>

But the insistence on the necessity of submission to the Church is perhaps most obvious in the Second Rule, which is notoriously suspect. The most orthodox biographers (it has been seen) cannot claim that it represents St. Francis' wishes, or seriously question that it was imposed upon him in the interests of ecclesiasticism. The most striking example of submission which this Rule contains is perhaps the passage wherein the ministers are enjoined to ask a governor for the Order from among the Cardinals, “so that being always subject and submissive at the feet of the same holy Church, grounded in the Catholic faith, we may

<sup>1</sup> Chap. xix. *Writings*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xvii. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church*, e.g., chap. ii, secs. 8 and 9, where he speaks of the observation of exterior religion becoming a means of entering into the true interior Church. And see the Introduction, pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Mirror*, lxxxvii.

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observe poverty and humility and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we have firmly promised.”<sup>1</sup> The only comment which would seem to be demanded by such a sentence is that St. Francis had himself been to Rome on more than one occasion, and was not ignorant of the methods of life of many of the Cardinals. He had reproved them for the ease of their life and seems to have had no particular illusions as to the manner in which they fell short of his own ideal of poverty. In the face of this, as in the face of the revolutions against the notoriously vicious lives of the clergy of the north of Italy, which had come to a head in the movement of the Paterenes,<sup>2</sup> it is difficult to imagine that St. Francis can have considered that poverty and humility were peculiarly characteristic of the Church of Rome. The passage, as so many other passages in the Second Rule, is, in fact, distinctly suggestive of the hand of some one other than St. Francis, with, perhaps, less of his clear-sightedness or less sincerity of expression.

But whatever has been included in the Rules as a result of papal pressure, or handed down in the biographies by those who were themselves unquestioning members of the Church, it remains evident that while St. Francis was undoubtedly orthodox in certain aspects of his character—for the atmosphere of Catholicism was inevitably as natural to him as the air he breathed—yet the facts of his life show him to have been singularly careless of the claims of orthodoxy when such claims militated against his innermost convictions. In respect of the Church he stands, like so many mystics, as the embodiment of a force over which the Church has flung the net of her government—a force which has in some measure broken through the restraint laid upon it, and in some measure been enmeshed thereby. To the degree in which St. Francis imposed his will on the

<sup>1</sup> Second Rule, chap. xii (*Writings*, p. 73).

<sup>2</sup> See E. Gebhart, *L'Italie Mystique*, pp. 28 *et seq.*


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Church he did so in obedience to what he unwaveringly felt to be the will of God—he was to such an extent a channel for the manifestation of the divine force; to the degree in which he counselled obedience to the Church he was, on one side, concerned with it as an authority to which it was good closely to submit the personal will as a training and a preparation, and on the other, as an enthusiastic member of a body which demanded from him conformity as a duty. In the final analysis his will was submitted to that of God only, and against it he admitted not even the voice and the authority of the Holy Church of Rome.





## Chapter Five

 MODERN WRITER HAS LAID EM-phasis on the importance of attention, not only as indicating that to which any life is directed, but as modifying its course in a very real measure. "Attention, desire, interest," she says, "all these words stand, I think, for the state of man in which the face of the soul is set and the hand of the soul is held out towards some other beyond, that it may be drawn into the life of the man as his own. . . . In the marvellous rhythm of life with life, desire and the potency of attention determine the flow of gifts from the greater to the included less, whether by an inner or an outer way."<sup>1</sup>

It is easily comprehensible that the direction of the attention is the determining factor of an existence of which the whole essence is consciousness. Yet a distinction should be made, it seems, between attention and desire, for they are hardly interchangeable terms. Desire is, in fact, the force which gives effect to attention: it is ultimately the driving power of the machine which attention guides, for desire can be deflected from one object and aimed at another by changing the occupation of the mind. Of its own accord it is difficult to regard desire as setting in any particular direction; it is at the command, rather, of the mind when the mind has realized its power. In common with all whose office is to serve it is liable to rebel and claim command as its own prerogative, but such rebellion is in general the result of a long-continued direction of it

<sup>1</sup> *A Modern Mystic's Way* (Duckworth and Co.), p. 43.

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by the attention in some particular channel. The habits of desire can become fixed no less than those of the body, and no one will question the force and determination that are required if they are to be broken at the word of their ruler. To dam a river at full flood is a task which is parallel to, but vastly easier than, that of deflecting the rush of desire when it is flowing in channels worn smooth by ages of use.

There would seem to be no limit to the efficacy of these powers if they be sincerely felt and firmly directed. Have they not been the key to conquest and success at all the times when men have striven to one goal or another in their history, underlying the unwavering fixity of purpose which has characterized the victors of battles both temporal and eternal? It is, indeed, questionable if any man can say that he has failed in that which he has wholly desired. Failures there are, and in plenty, and that in matters which appear to have claimed the whole of a man's attention and the fulness of his desire, but the essence of failure is in division of desire, and the rarity of success is but the evidence of the rarity of undivided desire. If there be any possibility of hindrance, whether by reason of the claims of modesty or of any code of honour or morality or anything whatsoever, or by reason of some other end being desired with equal or greater vehemence, it cannot be said that the desire is undivided, and the possibility of failure inevitably arises. Desire militates against desire, and it is only those who are ready unhesitatingly to sacrifice all other things to the one overpowering desire of all their being, who are assured of victory.

Of these are the saints. Their secret is that the consciousness of, and the communion with, God indwelling, which is the Kingdom of Heaven, is to be reached by fixed attention and by firm desire, and it is in this sense that it suffers violence at the hands of men. The peculiarity of those who have reached it is that it has been the point on

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which the whole of their attention was centred; from which no other concern was allowed to distract them. Anything which tended to occupy them to the exclusion of their one desire was simply put aside and allowed, as an object of desire, to have no further interest for them.

It is in this oneness of intention that lies the reason of the insistence on poverty which, through many centuries of trial and despite countless failures and evasions, was felt to be so essential a part of the religious life as to take an assured place among the monastic vows. Property became one of the *bêtes noires* of that life for the reason, in part, that it tended to demand too great a measure of the attention which should be devoted to things of the spirit; it came to be regarded as a thing which diverted the mind from God; and, as a protest against the natural inclination of the middle and of all ages to seek riches at any cost, there can be little doubt that it was a desirable thing that property should be held in contempt even by a small body of men. But poverty is, as are perhaps all things but One, a means to an end, and in itself is neither better nor worse than riches: the Kingdom of Heaven is not an appurtenance of the one *per se* any more than it is out of reach of the other unconditionally. The essence of that poverty which is the gate of the kingdom is a state of mind, of which neither rich nor poor have the monopoly.

But it was literal poverty at which the monastic vows were aimed, as distinguished to that extent from detachment. The actual non-possession of goods by the individual was demanded and obtained, and in this those who formulated the different rules were no doubt wise. In legislating for a class containing every variety of nature it was necessary to bear in mind the limitations of the weaker as well as the capacities of the stronger members, and to substitute detachment for literal poverty would have been in all probability to put a stumbling block in the way of the

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less steadfast. It is doubly easier for the majority of men to preserve peace of mind and spirit about a thing they have not got and do not allow themselves to want, than to retain the same unruffled equanimity about a thing they have got, but about which they attempt to remain undisturbed. In other words, detachment is a counsel for the spiritual aristocracy, and literal poverty is a safer condition for the generality of those concerned with the spiritual life.

The evident essence of this position as regards property is that the lack of it should be willing, whether the poverty be accepted or actively sought. The point, in fact, is much less the poverty in itself than the willingness with which it is embraced. Ruysbroeck emphasizes this by making voluntary poverty the second step in the Ascent of Spiritual Love, as the first-fruit of the goodwill which is the first step. "He who is willingly poor is free, and without the cares of this world's goods," he says;<sup>1</sup> going straight to the heart of all that has ever been written about poverty, and avoiding that laudation of it for its own sake which characterizes a large number of Christian writers. Such praise can only be due to an unthinking acceptance of a traditional conception, or to a blindness which may possibly be due to an ignorance of the facts, which lead into a labyrinth of loose and sentimental thinking. The popular Christian view would seem to be that the poor are *ipso facto* in some obscure way nearer to God than the rich, and that they are more particularly the care of the Deity than the rich can ever hope to be. Whether this arise from a confused idea that, because the Christ of the Gospels was poor, therefore all other poor bear some close resemblance to Him; or whether it spring from a remembrance of the fact that riches are spoken of in the New Testament as something of a bar to entrance into the kingdom, the

<sup>1</sup> Ruysbroeck, *Of the Seven Steps in the Ascent of Spiritual Love*, chap. ii.



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result is that the very fact of poverty has been taken as conferring a claim on the poor to be considered as more especially the property of God. Such phrases as "God's poor" go a considerable way towards preventing a realization that the rich belong to Him no less, and that there is no reason to suppose that His interest (if the term be permitted) in the soul of Dives is any less than in that of Lazarus.

The facts as regards the desirability of poverty for its own sake are, in truth, all on the other side. Instead of the poor in the goods of the world being, by the very fact, the most blessed—in that they are freed from concern with temporal things and so, presupposing a desire for God, at liberty to devote their minds and their desire wholly to Him—it is entirely evident that the reverse of this is the case. The rich can in any case secure moments of freedom from interference and concern, but the majority of the poor are haunted by the perpetual need of giving all their attention to the acquisition of immediate necessities. They are thus in a condition of intense desire for, and attention to, property with the one aim of getting it for themselves, and it would be difficult to maintain that such a position savours in any particular way of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is only by the addition of willingness that the situation can be regarded as in any way productive of the desired liberty.

But poverty in its ultimate sense carries on a campaign not against property only, but against all that is implied by the idea of property. As a part of the system of self-annihilation it fights against propriety, in the original sense of that word as meaning exclusive possession, and so strikes at the tendency of the individual to appropriate to himself anything which may happen to come into his hands. It is from this aspect that the doctrine of poverty assumes a particular interest for the position of the mystic, for it is one with his disinclination to erect barriers of no



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matter what kind between himself and the world at large, and from this aspect also that there is found an additional reason for prescribing literal poverty, rather than detachment, as a Rule. To possess a thing, so as to say, "This is mine," is to imply "This is not yours," to the whole remainder of humanity, and so to make a certain division with respect to the thing possessed. It is an insistence on separateness. It is, in fact, as a rule, to claim not only possession, but ownership of a thing of which properly there is only a usufruct from God. And since, in respect of the spirit, division is impossible, to permit a distribution of property of which the essence is the separateness of the different holders is to emphasize just that which wars against the spirit in the most vital way.

It is, therefore, because property increases the sense of selfhood as well as because it claims an undue share of the attention, that it was banned by those entering the religious life, and literal poverty was demanded. But it is evident that poverty in this sense is not confined to forbidding the possession of actual material goods, but applies with equal force to all things that connote the idea of possession. It is aimed against the sense of appropriation as such, which has been seen (in dealing with the will) to characterize especially the lower divided self. Anything which is capable of appropriation by one man as against another is impliedly ruled out by poverty, so that for a man who has willingly taken on this condition there is no possibility of making a claim to anything whatever. He cannot demand for himself good fame at the hands of the world any more than he can demand riches; he will be as little anxious for that elusive, but terribly real, possession which is his reputation as he will for any tangible goods; and the peculiar normal attitude which regards health as a personal belonging will, it would seem, inevitably make way for a position which shows less of petulance and more of peace.

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Literal poverty that is willingly embraced, then, is in its perfection both the cause and the effect of a state of mind which is unwilling to stop short of anything less than God in His most unveiled revelation of Himself—a state of mind that cries with St. Catherine of Genoa: “Non voglio uqello che esce da Te,” being unable to rest content with that which proceeds from Deity. Its concern is to transfer its attention from the thing to That which lies behind all things, and is their common Substance—to pierce through the outward shell to that which is their core. This is the essence of unworldliness, which is to refuse to take the world on its own exaggerated valuation, and to judge it by the standard of the spirit alone.

But in distinction to literal poverty there is another attitude with regard to property and its implications which is equally possible and perhaps more desirable. This is detachment. Ultimately, they are both attitudes of mind, but detachment suggests a position which is less conspicuously concerned with and dependent on the actual fact of possession or non-possession of things. “Detachment consists,” wrote Coventry Patmore, “not in casting aside all natural loves and goods, but in the possession of a love and a good so great that all others, though they may and do acquire increase through the presence of the greater love and good, which explains and justifies them, seem nothing in comparison.”<sup>1</sup> Whereas literal poverty necessitates an abstention in fact from things which in themselves are in no way inherently evil, and thereby brings with it a hint of separateness which is naturally unwelcome to the mystic, detachment is concerned only with the attitude taken up with regard to property in any form. Questions of reputation, of honour, of fame, no less than of more tangible possessions, can not only no longer arouse a

<sup>1</sup> “The Rod, the Root, and the Flower” (*Aurea Diſſa*, xcvi).

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desire for those things, but their gain and loss must be equally unable to shake the foundation of peace. And yet detachment is not a condition of indifference; in its perfection it is a state in which the attention is so riveted on God that minor disturbances are unable to shake it. The means by which He is manifested in the shape of material goods or mental conceptions suffer no despite, but they lose their hold, to interfere or perturb. And while in the first place detachment is from the pleasures and cares of the world, it is also, in the second place and in the final analysis, from the joys and sorrows of the spirit, so that peace uninterrupted may ultimately reign.

Nor does detachment imply insensibility to others' suffering, though it does, maybe, to one's own. It is not to be self-centred, but makes rather for a state in which there is no self remaining by which attachment is possible. For the spirit which supplants the annihilated self is free, and not subject to the bondage of attachment in any of its forms. So far, in fact, from detachment necessitating callousness to suffering, it is the key of sympathy, for it is unaffected by the claims and demands of self-interest on the ordinary planes, and leaves its possessor free to respond as he best may. For it is desire in its direction towards the self that makes sympathy impossible: who is more callous than the man of many desires? Detachment is, in fact, the gate of freedom, not only because of the immunity which it imports from the bondage of the world, but because of the entrance which it gives into the life of the spirit.

The distinction between what may fairly be called two aspects of detachment has been succinctly put by Professor William James. The first aspect is that of the Stoic, who proceeds by dispossessing himself in advance of all that is out of his power. He says in effect: "What do I care?" to all that may occur; his is a negative position; his head

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is bloody but quite unbowed under the bludgeonings of chance. "This," as Professor James remarks, "though efficacious and heroic enough in its place and time, is . . . only possible as an habitual mood of the soul to narrow and unsympathetic characters. It proceeds altogether by exclusion." It proceeds, in fact, by an intrenchment of the self; by a lopping off of what is beyond control. The alternative method proceeds by the way of expansion and inclusion. It is positive; it negates nothing; its insistence is on exaltation rather than depression, and its watchword is that of Marcus Aurelius: "O Universe, I wish all that thou wishest."<sup>1</sup>

In both cases the claim of personal preference is done away with, and that which comes is accepted with undisturbed equanimity by the disciple of both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. In terms of the two selves the method of the Stoic is that in which the emphasis is laid on the fact that man is *not* his lower self; all that does not appertain to the higher self is excluded and no more account is taken of it. By the alternative method the insistence is on the corresponding fact that man *is* his higher self, and that self is by its nature all-inclusive. It hails with joy and does not only accept with resignation all that comes, for being of the spirit exclusion is naturally foreign to it, and for it there is neither evil nor distress. But while the Stoic's method is palpably on a less high level than that of the follower of the alternative method—by reason, namely, of his use of exclusion rather than inclusion—it is not, any more than is detachment as a whole, to be confounded with indifference. Resignation is founded upon hope, but indifference rests upon despair, and resignation should no more be taken for sorrow than desire for joy. Both resignation and acclamation with regard to all occurrences fulfil

<sup>1</sup> W. James, *Textbook of Psychology*, chap. xii, pp. 188-9.



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the need for unquestioning acceptance, and if the position in which it is possible to give thanks when the answer to a prayer is not heard—for to be grateful when a prayer is answered is a little thing—be not yet possible for all, there is no reason to cavil at those who at any rate do not indulge in the blasphemy of a fretful and undynamic discontent.

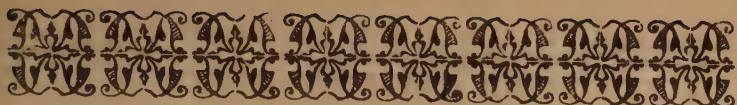
But it is just this non-concern with outward circumstances which renders detachment difficult of general fulfilment. When it is possible to prescribe literal poverty and to counsel contentment therewith, all has been done that it is possible to do to provide any body of aspirants after the life of the spirit with surroundings in which there are as few distractions as may be. But when in place of non-possession it is said that actual possession is of no moment one way or the other, but that everything depends on the attitude taken up with regard to the things possessed, a door is opened by which small deceits will enter into the lives of all but the most sincere. Man's capacity for self-deception is practically, but fortunately not quite, unlimited, and the instinctive tendency towards acquisition insinuates itself into his life in the most ingenious disguises. It is notoriously easy to find reasons why any form of property is desirable, in the almost sincere conviction that its possession will not unduly divert the attention from concerns of greater moment; and notorious also how, when the acquisition is an accomplished fact, it tends gradually to claim more and more both of attention and desire. Detachment being purely an attitude of mind, it is by that very reason more difficult of attainment than the willingness for a poverty which at any rate has its foundation in actual physical fact: the measure of its greater difficulty is the measure of the greater subtlety and elusiveness of all mental processes over those which are also in some part physical. For breaches of the rule of detachment there is a less obvious sanction than for those cases in which the rule of



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literal poverty is broken, because the breach is itself interior, and there need be little or no evidence of it externally.

To sum up, therefore, the willing acceptance of literal poverty is a less high method than that of detachment; for the one there is a perpetually visible reminder of the interior attitude which is desired, while for the other that attitude must rest upon recollection alone. Willingly to embrace poverty is therefore in some small sense a confession of weakness—an implied admission that in the face of property detachment is not achievable—but it is evidence of a strength immeasurably greater than that which cannot resolve to forgo the attractions of property in spite of a realization of its undesirability. And—perhaps just because of this comparative inferiority—literal poverty is more the rule for beginners, and fitly gives way to detachment as progress is made, and as the probability of self-deception decreases with the increase of penetration and sincerity.



## Chapter Six

**T**HE GENERAL FRANCISCAN SPIRIT with regard to poverty is beautifully suggested by a passage in the *Sacrum Commercium* of Giovanni Parenti. The Lady Poverty is invited to share with the brethren their scanty and unappetizing food, and after she has been served with goodwill and much humility, she lays herself down to sleep on the bare ground, with a stone for pillow. And when the Lady Poverty has slept, she rises up and asks to be shown the monastery. Whereat the brethren lead her to a hill and show her the whole world lying at their feet, and say "This is our monastery, Lady."<sup>1</sup>

In the simplicity of this allegory is intimated the spaciousness and freedom for which poverty stood in the Franciscan mind. It was the one sure condition of liberty, the release from the shackles of constraint in respect of provision for temporal necessities, and the final casting away of care in connection with possession of any kind. The brethren were made free of the world by poverty, in that no ties bound them to one place rather than another, and that the fewness of their requirements made them at home in any province in which they might find themselves. Their liberty was perfect in that they had no desire for possession, and the whole world was their monastery because for them a monastery was that place in which they might remain faithful to their dedications and be at liberty to praise God

<sup>1</sup> *Sacrum Commercium*, translated by Canon Rawnsley, chap. xxii. See *The Lady Poverty*, translated and edited by Montgomery Carmichael, pp. xxviii-xli for a discussion as to the probable authorship of the *Sacrum Commercium*.

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by the consecration of their lives. St. Bonaventure, paraphrasing Celano's panegyric on the state of the brethren as a body, speaks of them as being "swift unto all obedience, strong to labour and speedy in journeying," because of the poverty they embraced. "And since they possessed no earthly things they set their affections on naught, and had naught that they feared to lose; they were everywhere at ease, weighed down by no fear, harassed by no care; they lived like men who were removed from vexations of the mind, and, taking no thought for it, awaited the morrow, and their night's lodging."<sup>1</sup> Although this description paints the perfect result of poverty rather than the invariable attitude of all the brethren, it suggests the spirit animating the brotherhood at its inception, and the ideal which has been before them from that time onward.

That ideal is, of course, traceable directly to St. Francis, and the realization of the liberty conferred by poverty enters into the conception which he formed of it as that which he took for the companion of his life. But his conception does not seem to have rested solely on the idea of poverty as the condition of liberty, but to have been composed of a variety of elements.

The chief of these was almost unquestionably the literal poverty of Christ as portrayed in the Gospels. To the ardent sympathy of St. Francis, with his vivid realization of the ineffable value of the Incarnation, any direct departure from any detail of such a life—in so far as it lay within man's power and was subject to his choice—must have seemed in some sense a betrayal. Having deliberately taken that life as his model, he adhered to its exterior circumstances in their minutest detail, as he strove to realize its interior significance within himself. And as Christ's poverty was to him the most striking of the outward condi-

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, iv, 7. Cf. Celano, i, 39.



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tions of His life, he insisted on poverty as a *sine qua non* in the lives of all whose intention it was to follow Him. He took poverty, that is, as the setting of the life of Him whom he worshipped, and posited it without further question as the setting of his own life. The practical identification of the idea of poverty with the idea of Christ is brought out with significant clearness in the praises of poverty which have been preserved in the *Fioretti*. "Companion mine," said St. Francis to Brother Masseo as they were approaching Rome on one occasion, "let us go to St. Peter and St. Paul and pray them that they will teach us and aid us to possess the immeasurable treasure of most holy Poverty; for she is a treasure so surpassing and so Divine that we are not worthy to possess it in our most vile vessels; for this is that celestial virtue whereby all earthly things and transitory are trodden under foot and every barrier is removed which might hinder the soul from freely uniting itself to the eternal God. This is that virtue which enableth the soul, while yet on earth, to hold converse in heaven with the angels; this is she who bare Christ company upon the cross, with Christ was buried, with Christ was raised again, and with Christ ascended into heaven."<sup>1</sup> It was poverty as the companion of Christ both in His trials and His glory that St. Francis took as his own fellow traveller on his journey through life, to whom he was faithful even in the hour of his death.

But having drawn the essence of his conception from such a source, St. Francis was not content with the mere fact. The romance of his temperament intervened and draped the nakedness of the idea with the rich robes of his imagination. He personified to himself the quality that he sought, and under the touch of his fervour it became inspired

<sup>1</sup> *Little Flowers*, xiii. Cf. *Sacrum commercium*, chap. v, where the connection between Christ and the Lady Poverty is traced from His birth to His death.

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with living reality. To his knightly spirit, fed upon the songs and the tales of Provençal minstrels, Poverty stood as the Lady to whom he had vowed his service, and it is more than likely that his passion for all that was high and beautiful in chivalry was a material factor in the completeness of his allegiance. With the remembrance of the Exemplar of poverty it is not difficult to believe that there was mingled the intense romance of faithfulness to a Lady to whom the world did no homage; her personification provided him with a being whom he could serve in the solitude of his thoughts both for her own perfect beauty and as the handmaid of Christ. And with such convictions, and having pledged himself to such fealty, it was inevitable that the whole course of his life should be shaped in a way which made fidelity possible. To the passionate lover that was St. Francis the object of his adoration must be always present, and he saw to it that at no time in his life, and at no place in his journeyings, she should be slighted by the least inattention. He made ready for her with scarcity as other men make ready with rich offerings, and he was rewarded by her freedom and her strength as other men have seldom been. He wooed her in hunger and cold, and won her in want; and if at the present day it should seem that different methods are demanded, it is possible at least to render the honour that is due to so whole-hearted and impassioned a seeker.

Besides these two elements of Christ-imitation and romance there must have entered into St. Francis' understanding of poverty its effect on, and its use for, the world. It has to be remembered here as always, that St. Francis was legislating for his brethren by his life: he does not seem to have been guided solely by a consideration of what was necessary for his own spiritual needs, but to have kept in mind the tendencies both to weakness and to strength of those for whom he was, in his turn, an example. Celano's

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phrase: "he made a tongue of his whole body," sounds like a description stung into vividness by the intensity of the fact described. In so legislating, therefore, it is not improbable that he kept in mind the fact that there is and must always be one law for the weak and another for the strong in the life of the spirit, and that in his insistence on absolute literal poverty he was influenced by the needs of the generality of mankind, and not only by those of the elect. It has been seen in the preceding chapter that literal poverty is unquestionably the safer foundation for a general rule, since the qualities of greater subtlety and sincerity required for a proper fulfilment of the counsels of detachment cannot be counted on in their perfection in the rank and file of any community. To build on the foundation of poverty was, therefore, to ensure a stronger building than could otherwise have been achieved: it was to provide an atmosphere from which distractions were as nearly excluded as possible, and in which niceties of distinction gave way to an almost certain safety.

St. Francis' conception of poverty, then, appears as having been drawn from the desire to follow the example of Christ in things external as well as in those which are more specifically interior; as having been nourished by its personification as the Lady whom he served in accordance with the promptings of his inborn tendency to romance; and as having been sealed by the realization of its high utility in freeing those who accepted it from the distractions of the world and from the ever-increasing bondage of property.

But it is not to be supposed that St. Francis perfected his idea of poverty at one stroke: as with most vital conceptions it was a gradual growth springing from an exceptionally vivid realization of its value. The idea was, as it were, conceived in a moment of rare penetration and clearness of sight, and took shape and grew as circumstances demanded. The memorable moment at Assisi when St. Francis, after

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the last of the sumptuous banquets with the *jeunesse dorée* of the town, made his sudden declaration of betrothal to a nobler, richer, fairer lady than they had ever seen, marks the birth of the idea into full consciousness.<sup>1</sup> The declaration does not seem to be exclusively referable to his betrothal with poverty; it was rather the moment of his renunciation of his past life and the turning of it in the new direction of God. But included in his dedication to the life of the spirit from that moment forward, there was—it is not possible to doubt—the definite conception of poverty as in some degree symbolizing all his intentions. What actually was in his mind is of course a matter of sheer conjecture, but the “bride nobler and richer and fairer than ever ye have seen” is a peculiarly apt description of poverty from the standpoint of St. Francis. Poverty was to him the key of riches, and no words were too extravagant in which to praise it.

Following shortly after the declaration came the first pilgrimage to Rome, and it was during his stay there that St. Francis put his resolution into tentative practice. Changing his clothes for those of one of the beggars who crowded about the door of St. Peter's, he passed the whole day standing there and asking alms,<sup>2</sup> and so came into veritable contact with what was afterwards to be his habitual condition. But he was not yet fully weaned from his belief in the efficacy of money. Some little time after his return to Assisi came the command to repair the Church, and the interpretation of it by St. Francis into a command to rebuild San Damiano. His first movement was to offer money to the priest in charge of the church, that a lamp might burn perpetually before the Crucifix therein.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by the departure of St. Francis to Foligno

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 7; *Legend*, 7 and 13.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 8; *Legend*, 10; Bonaventure, i, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, ii, 11; *Legend*, 13.

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with a large quantity of stuff from his father's shop, and the sale of both the stuff and the horse on which he rode. The money thus gained he offered to the priest of San Damiano, but when the priest refused to accept it St. Francis seems to have given no more thought to the matter, for he threw it on to the window ledge and let it stay there.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare his attitude at this time with regard to money with that which he showed a short time later when he ironically heaped money on the priest Sylvester because of his complaint that St. Francis had not paid him enough for the stones to be employed in rebuilding San Damiano;<sup>2</sup> and with that also which he showed towards the end of his life. On his last journey back to Assisi the soldiers who were with him, as a guard against possible onslaughts from neighbouring towns anxious to secure his body, complained that they could buy no food in a small village at which they had stopped. He suggested that they should ask food as an alms, instead of as a thing to be bought with money, and it is related that on doing so the knights received from the people ample food for all their needs.<sup>3</sup>

It was about a month after this offer of money to the priest—a month which he spent in hiding from his father's anger<sup>4</sup>—that there came the clinching of St. Francis' decision for poverty in its most literal aspect. He gave evidence of it with dramatic suddenness, in such a way as to impress his decision indelibly on his own mind and the minds of all the citizens of Assisi. The details of the scene of his disinheritance are too well known to need minute description. At the instigation of the bishop he returned to his father the money obtained from the transaction at Foligno, and, suddenly stripping off all his clothes, stood

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 8, 9; *Legend*, 16; Bonaventure, ii, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 109; *Legend*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, ii, 77; Bonaventure, vii, 10; *Mirror*, xxii.

<sup>4</sup> Celano, i, 10; *Legend*, 16; Bonaventure, ii, 2.



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naked before the assembly. In this return to his father of all that he could in any sense have been said to have received from him, was symbolized the complete independence which he then and there claimed. "Hear ye all and understand," he cried; "until now have I called Peter Bernadone my father, but, for that I purpose to serve the Lord, I give back unto him the money over which he was vexed, and all the clothes that I have had of him, desiring to say only 'Our Father Which art in Heaven,' not 'my father, Peter Bernadone.'" <sup>1</sup> From this moment forward his life was founded on a disbelief in the efficacy of money to obtain anything of ultimate value, and he insisted with ever-increasing vehemence on the non-ownership of property in any form.

Examples of it abound. On his return with the first brethren from Rome, whither they had gone to obtain the Papal approval of the Primitive Rule, they took up their lodging in a disused hut at Rivo Torto, and lived in complete peace in spite of the smallness of the place. But one day a peasant arrived with his donkey, and, finding it occupied, appears to have taunted the brethren with owning the place in spite of their profession of poverty. To the mind of St. Francis any position which laid them open to such an accusation was intolerable, so without more ado he left the hut to the new-comers, and proved the sincerity of his dedication to absolute non-ownership. <sup>2</sup> The brethren removed to the Portiuncula, of which they were permitted the use by the monks of the Abbey on Monte Subasio, though they did not possess it as their own. <sup>3</sup> It was the place in which they lived, not their particular property, and to the end of his life St. Francis resented any attempt to treat it as if it belonged to them. When the

<sup>1</sup> *Legend*, 20. Cf. Celano, i, 15; Bonaventure, ii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, i, 44; *Legend*, 55.

<sup>3</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 106, note 3.

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people of Assisi built a house there during his absence, for the use of the brethren at an approaching Chapter, the first thing he did on his return was to get up on to the roof and begin tearing it to pieces. Under the impression that it was the work of the brethren, and as such savoured too much of ownership for their profession, he abused them roundly as traitors to the Lady Poverty, and told them to come up and help him destroy so monstrous a thing. In the end he was only dissuaded from razing the building to the ground by the assurance that it did not belong to the brethren at all, but to the city.<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion—this time just after his return from the Holy Land, when he was particularly sensitive to anything which seemed to deviate from the way of strict simplicity and poverty—he arrived at Bologna to find that a house of the brethren had lately been built. The fact that Bologna was a centre of learning, and that St. Francis had a well-founded fear of the brethren becoming over-occupied with the concerns of the schools, was doubtless largely the cause of his severe conduct; but it also seems certain that the announcement that the house belonged to the brethren was sufficient in itself to incense him. His action was prompt and effective. Calling Peter Stacia, the Provincial of the district, he cursed him for his treachery to the Franciscan ideal, and followed up his malediction by turning every single brother out of the house, not allowing even the sick to remain. He was only persuaded to allow them to return on the public announcement being made that the house belonged to the Holy See, and not in any way to the brethren.<sup>2</sup> The assumption of ownership was so intolerable to him that an indication of it such as occurred

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 57; *Mirror*, vii.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 58; *Mirror*, vi; *Actus S. Francisci*, 61. See Cuthbert, *Life*, pp. 251, 266.

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on this occasion was one of the rare things that caused him to lay aside his usual mildness.

But apart from his severity towards his followers in this respect, St. Francis' strictness with regard to his own action is proverbial. It is needless here to enumerate the countless occasions on which he gave away his clothes to anyone that asked for or needed them, rather than appear to possess them as his own property, for all his biographies are filled with them. It has been mentioned already that he went to the extent of giving away the only New Testament that the brethren had,<sup>1</sup> and on one occasion he refused any longer to inhabit a cell because a brother had spoken of it as his. "For that thou hast called it mine," was his remark, "another shall stay there henceforth, and not I."<sup>2</sup> It would be difficult to imagine an example of a more complete refusal to allow any hint of exclusive possession to attach to him: it is the apotheosis of non-appropriation.

The general view which St. Francis held with respect to property is not difficult of extraction from the varied incidents of his life. That which lies at the bottom of it is the feeling that as all things depend on and ultimately belong to God, they should be held in common by those who have the use of them. "Blessed is the servant who gives up all his goods to the Lord God," he wrote, "for he who retains anything for himself hides 'his Lord's money' and that 'which he thinketh he hath shall be taken away from him.'"<sup>3</sup> To put in a claim of ownership was to insist on a division in the things which had been provided for mankind in general: it was to erect a claim to finality in a region where God alone was final. It emphasized not only the division of material things into as many parts as there were claims to possession, but the much graver division between those who made these claims, which is the inevitable

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, ix; Celano, ii, 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Writings*, p. 15, Admonition 19.

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consequence of property. Property would, in fact, seem to have stood for St. Francis for the mutual exclusion which is the antithesis of love, and for this reason, if for no other, he desired his followers to have what few things he considered it permissible to have, in common.<sup>1</sup> He would not even allow the brethren to have psalters of their own, and the reason which he gave to a novice who desired to have one is plainly founded on this dislike of separateness. On the novice's first request St. Francis pointed out to him that there was something wanting in a man who was content to read about the achievements of the saints, instead of following in their steps and doing as they had done; but this was not sufficient to deter the novice. He returned to the charge a few days later, whereon St. Francis said: "After you have a psalter, you will desire and wish to have a breviary. Then you will sit in your chair like a great prelate, and say to your brother, 'Bring me the breviary.'"<sup>2</sup> Here it was the assumption of importance as the result of ownership, which St. Francis emphasized and so greatly deprecated: the possession even of so small a thing as a psalter was in his mind sufficient to raise up some barrier of division between its owner and his brethren. It would bring with it the inclination to command, and for a brotherhood whose watchword was humility this was to be avoided at all costs.

But this, naturally enough, did not satisfy him. The holding of their scanty clothes and begged food in common among the brethren only would have been a marking-off of the brethren as such from the surrounding world, and it was therefore a part of his position that, for example, their clothes belonged to the poor as of right. His way of putting it was that they should return them to those to whom they also belonged, inasmuch as they had received

<sup>1</sup> See Celano, ii, 180; *Mirror*, v.  
*Mirror*, iv.

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them as a loan only until they should find one poorer than themselves.<sup>1</sup> On giving his mantle to a poor woman towards the end of his life, his remark was "The poor man to whom you entrusted this mantle, gives thanks to thee for the loan of the mantle; take that which is thine own."<sup>2</sup> To insist on ownership was, in fact, in his eyes simply theft: to say to anyone "This is mine" was to rob that person because the thing really belonged to him also, and the theft was aggravated if he should happen to be the poorer of the two.<sup>3</sup>

The particular drawback of theft from the spiritual standpoint, it would seem, is that it makes against the essence of love, which is the desire to give. As for St. John of the Cross some three centuries later, the appetites and pleasures prevent the soul from going "into the liberty of the perfect love of God," so for St. Francis property would do the same thing no less surely. When he was talking to the Bishop of Assisi about the advisability of adhering to the strict poverty he had proposed, the bishop suggested that it seemed to him a very harsh way of life. But St. Francis, even at that early time—he had only three brethren—pointed out that if they had property they would need arms to protect themselves, and on account of the disputes that would arise the love of God and of their neighbour would be in danger of hindrance.<sup>4</sup> And later, in one of the additions to the Primitive Rule, he carries the same teaching a step farther. Speaking of the desirable attitude of the brethren towards money, he exhorts them neither to receive it nor cause it to be received, and adds: "Let us therefore take care lest after having left all things we lose the kingdom of heaven for such a trifle."<sup>5</sup> And—

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, xxx; Celano, ii, 87; Bonaventure, viii, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, xxxiii; Celano, ii, 92.

<sup>3</sup> *Mirror*, xxx; Celano, ii, 87; Bonaventure, viii, 5. <sup>4</sup> *Legend*, 35.

<sup>5</sup> First Rule, chap. viii (*Writings*, p. 41). See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 400.



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since the Kingdom of Heaven is in one sense both love itself and the result of love—the teachings are consistent. Poverty, therefore, was not only the gate of liberty for him in the ordinary sense, but the means of a liberty which was directly aimed at the highest goal of mankind.

But apart from the separateness which is inevitably bound up with the sentiment of ownership, St. Francis detected also the danger of property occupying too great a portion of the attention. It stood for an interest which distracted from the goal of the spirit. "Blessed are the clean of heart; for they shall see God," he quoted, and continued: "They are clean of heart who despise earthly things and always seek those of heaven, and never cease to adore and contemplate the Lord God Living and True, with a pure heart and mind."<sup>1</sup> The adoration with a pure heart was thus dependent on a non-concern with the ownership of things. To St. Francis, then, it seemed that the ascent to heaven was made more quickly from a hovel than from a palace<sup>2</sup> just because in the hovel as he occupied it the probabilities of distraction were less, and the mind was more at liberty to concern itself with the things of the spirit. And the minuteness with which he guarded against such distraction is shown by an incident which is related by Celano. During one Lent he had been filling up his spare time by making a cup, and while he was reciting the office his eyes suddenly caught the cup and his mind was distracted from the prayer. When he had finished praying, therefore, he took the cup and burnt it, in the force of his determination that nothing of any kind should persist which might act as a distraction.<sup>3</sup> The one-pointedness of mind which he desired is borne witness to also in another passage, which merits quotation. "His chiefest study," writes the biographer, "was to be free from all the things

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 15, Admonition 16.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, i, 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 97.

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that are in the world, lest the serenity of his mind might even for a moment be troubled by the taint of any dust. He made himself insensible to the din of all outward things; and, gathering up with all his might from every side the outward senses, and keeping the natural impulses in check, occupied himself with God alone. . . . Accordingly he often used to choose out solitary places in order that he might therein wholly direct his mind to God; but yet, when he saw that the time was favourable, he was not slothful in attending to business and in applying himself gladly to the salvation of his neighbours. For his safest haven was prayer: not prayer for one moment, not vacant or presumptuous prayer, but long continued, full of devotion, calm and humble; if he began late he scarce ended with morning. Walking, sitting, eating, and drinking, he was intent on prayer.”<sup>1</sup>

It is precisely this continuous attention to the Highest—wholly emptied of himself as St. Francis is said to have been—this mental attitude in the midst of all outward circumstances, which is the essence of prayer, and is most in danger of disturbance by the incessant cares of property. There is no doubt that, in spite of the insistence of its calls, it is possible for a man to deal with them without diverting his attention from the God which lies behind them all, but neither is there any doubt that such behaviour demands a degree of penetration and force immeasurably greater than that which is normally found. Given a mind capable of unswerving attention to the One, in spite of its immediate concern with the many, property may abound without any detriment to its spiritual welfare; but the rarity of such minds is ample reason for enjoining poverty on the multitude. There can scarcely be any reasonable doubt that in the case of St. Francis himself—especially

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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towards the end of his life—there would have been little or no danger of distraction by reason of property, but St. Francis was not legislating for himself alone. As has been remarked already, he was legislating for all the brethren by his actual life, and was consequently forced to give example in his own actions of that which he believed necessary for them.

Thus a passage in the *Fioretti* already quoted speaks of him as describing poverty as “that celestial virtue whereby all earthly things and transitory are trodden under foot and every barrier is removed which might hinder the soul from freely uniting itself to the eternal God. This is that virtue which enableth the soul, while yet on earth, to hold converse in heaven with the angels . . .”<sup>1</sup> If poverty remove the barrier to union with God, then property must erect it, and while the things which are possessed cannot in themselves be regarded as constituting that barrier, the sentiment of their position can. There cannot be a union with That which stands behind all if there be an active disunion from that behind which It stands, and the sentiment of possession—as implying separateness—is eminently fitted to produce just such a disunion. To consider it as preventing the soul, while yet on earth, from holding converse in heaven with the angels is therefore a very literal statement of the fact; it prevents inevitably the attainment of a state of which free intercourse in the unity of the spirit is a characteristic. Poverty, as St. Francis saw it, is the antithetical condition. “Where there is poverty and joy there is neither cupidity nor avarice,” he wrote in one of his Admonitions,<sup>2</sup> and cupidity and avarice are the extreme forms of that which is natural to property when its

<sup>1</sup> *Little Flowers*, xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Writings*, p. 19, Admonition 27. Cf. Salutation of the Virtues (*ibid.*, p. 21): “Holy poverty confounds cupidity and avarice and the cares of this world.”

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ownership is insisted upon. They stand for the misdirection of desire, and the exclusion of that which makes for union in any and all its forms. Such a sentence also makes it evident that for poverty to be efficacious it must be indissolubly linked with an attitude of mind which accepts it willingly.<sup>1</sup> Though in one respect poverty as he conceived it was to St. Francis one of the conditions of real joy, he regarded the two also as allies. As he was proverbially unwilling that any of his brethren should embrace a state that they could not embrace joyfully, so the willingness with which poverty was to be accepted was inseparable from it in St. Francis' mind. It is, for the rest, of a piece with his character that he would not have obedience to any rule given grudgingly.

Finally, the possession of property was eminently unfitting for those who should live, according to the express desire of their leader, as pilgrims wandering in a country which was not their proper home. This view of mankind as exiles from their true country occurs repeatedly throughout the old biographies and the writings of St. Francis himself. He was anxious that the conception should ever be present in the minds of the brethren, as a reminder of the great inheritance of the spirit which was their due. "Let the brothers," he wrote in his will, "take care not to receive on any account churches, poor dwelling-places, and all other things that are constructed for them, unless they are as is becoming the holy poverty which we have promised in the Rule, always dwelling there as strangers and pilgrims."<sup>2</sup> And again in the Second Rule he directs them to be as pilgrims and strangers in this world,<sup>3</sup> desiring them to be attached to nothing of the world for its own sake.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bernardin, *L'Esprit de St. François d'Assise* (Paris, 1880), vol. i, p. 342: "Il faut élever le temple de la pauvreté évangélique sur la pauvreté intérieure."

<sup>2</sup> *Writings*, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. vi. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

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It is patent, by the evidence of his whole life, that he did not underestimate the beauties of the world and all that they meant as manifestations of that which lay behind them, but his insistence on the pilgrimage conception emphasized the fact that in themselves those beauties were little or nothing, but only the entrance to a more splendid and concealed mystery. It was not, it may be well believed, solely in some remote heaven that St. Francis looked for a return from exile, but in the world seen with the eyes of the spirit rather than with those of the flesh only. He knew that converse with the angels was possible during the life of this earth, but he knew also, it appears, that it is only when men's eyes are detached from the earth, and their minds from its interests, that those eyes can gain the clearness which will enable them to see the angels by which they are surrounded. Only when the mind is concerned with that which is deeper and more subtle than the appearance of things, can it comprehend the communications of the spirit which are for ever offered. This is the return from exile, and the whole world is then the Promised Land of the spirit.

But meanwhile the appearance must not be taken as final, and the detached attitude of the pilgrim must be preserved to avoid such a belief in its finality. "He loved," it is related of St. Francis, "nothing in tables or vessels which might remind him of the world; to the end that everything might sing of pilgrimage and exile,"<sup>1</sup> and that he might thereby avoid taking the world as it appeared as ultimate. He taught that "the rules of pilgrims were to abide under a strange roof, to thirst for their fatherland, and to pass on their way in peace," regarding nothing as their own and concentrating their attention on their true home in that God Who is everywhere. During their pil-

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 60; *Mirror*, v. See also *Legend*, 59.



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grimage they might celebrate, as did the Israelites in their symbolic exile, the Passover which was a reminder of "the Lord's departure from this world unto the Father," and might in their case stand for a perpetual remembrance of their own ultimate return.<sup>1</sup>

The profession of absolute poverty, however, though it provide an atmosphere of freedom in which the life of the spirit may grow unhampered, does not of itself offer a solution of the problem as to how physical life is to be sustained meanwhile. It raises this problem, rather; and if the continuation of that physical life be regarded as desirable some system of supplying its demands must be found. For St. Francis there does not seem to have been any difficulty on this head. He did not propose starvation as a remedy for all troubles, but turned to the world in general with the conviction that his needs would be satisfied. With the same clearness with which he considered the few goods that the brethren had to be held in common, both among themselves and with all men, he also regarded the belongings of the rich as being ultimately held in the same way. Startling as it must have been to his contemporaries, there was no other view possible for one holding the convictions that he did. Towards the end of his life he expressed his opinion of the matter quite clearly, and it is evident from his conduct at all times after he had devoted himself to literal poverty that the opinion had been held consistently. It will be remembered that when he was being brought back to Assisi for the last time, and his guard had been unable to buy food in the village at which they had stopped, he advised them to ask as an alms what they had been unable to obtain for money. "And do not," he said, "by a false reckoning esteem this a thing shameful or base, since the great Almsgiver hath in His abounding goodness

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, vii, 2, 9; Celano, ii, 59.

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granted all things as alms unto the worthy and unworthy alike, after we have sinned.”<sup>1</sup> If all things were an alms from God they were necessarily to be regarded as held in common: no individual had a right to claim ownership of them because to do so was to usurp the place of the Giver of them all. That which was in the world was for the common use of all the world, and the obvious way of obtaining anything that was necessary was therefore simply to ask for it.

Such a position must have been as amazing to the society of the thirteenth century as it would be to that of to-day. Society was divided as clearly then as it is now, if not indeed more clearly, into those that had and those that had not, and the struggle between one division and the other seems to have been equally acute. Violent disputes were, for example, constantly arising in all the communes of Italy, and the division between the two factions in most of these disputes was between those who had more and those who had less.<sup>2</sup> But on St. Francis and his followers the distribution of property had no effect. They asked their alms of all classes alike, in the conviction that they had an equal right to what had, in reality, only been lent to the possessors. But their right stopped when their needs had been satisfied. It was part and parcel of his belief that it would be wrong to beg more than was necessary, for he had no desire to make of begging a means of laying up just that property which he had so strenuously disowned. He went even so far as to say that to beg more than is needful is to commit theft;<sup>3</sup> and if to his mind it was unquestionably a theft to lay claim to anything whatever, when he knew perfectly well all the time that it belonged to God, the saying can be understood. It is this reference of all things to the ultimate Giver that makes

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, vii, 10; Celano, ii, 77.

<sup>2</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Mirror*, xii.

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respect for property as such impossible, and it may well have seemed to St. Francis that the theft gained in gravity what it lost in consideration as such among men, by the fact that it was not a mere filching from one man by another, but virtually a robbery of God. For this reason it was to him equally a theft not to give to a man poorer than himself,<sup>1</sup> so that the essence of theft was the retaining that of which another had need. How far this implied rebuke to the great owners of property had any effect on the bulk of them is doubtful, but that it was not entirely ineffective is attested by the conversions of men like Bernard of Quintavalle, of which the biographies contain a considerable number.

For the rest, St. Francis had no sympathy for those who were ashamed of begging. Shame was rather the proper sentiment of those who retained property, and not of those who were simply asking them to hand on that to which they could have no final right. He boldly said that to be ashamed of begging was hostile to salvation, for it was in the first place an evidence of disbelief in the ultimate ownership of God, and in the second an offering made to the lower and divided self.<sup>2</sup> He took every occasion to impress the folly of shame on the brethren both by argument and his own example, and succeeded in inspiring them with something of his own force and conviction.<sup>3</sup> He insisted on it even in the Second Rule, directing them to go confidently in quest of alms without shame, remembering that the great Exemplar Whom they followed had also been poor in this world.<sup>4</sup>

As a corollary to the modern tendency to look with disfavour on begging as a means of obtaining a livelihood, there has at times been an inclination to consider that its

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, xxx.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 71. Cf. *supra*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> See Celano, ii, 71-8.

<sup>4</sup> Chap. vi. *Writings*, p. 69.

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institution by St. Francis for his brotherhood reflects unworthily on him.<sup>1</sup> The usual complaint is that the beggar contributes nothing in return for what is given him, and in a society where repayment of some kind is normally demanded for any outlay such a course constitutes a singularly unpardonable offence. There appears to be a further lurking objection that beggars gain without effort what other people are forced to obtain at the cost of recognized work. And, over all, begging is considered as indicating a lack of self-respect, which respect it seems is therefore based on the theory that what is worth having can only be bought and not received as a gift. But it was just this respect of what St. Francis saw as a lower self, limited in its expansion and divided off from other selves, that he desired to break down; and he recognized that the necessity of begging was particularly efficacious in achieving this. To ask another man freely to give for the love of God was to recognize the final ownership by God of all things, and thereby to destroy the intermediate claim of the holder as distinguished from the equal right of him who asked. It was also to do away with the sentiment of separateness on the part of the beggar, by emphasizing the common parentage at least, if not the ultimate identity, of him and the giver. The objection in chief to begging, therefore, was for St. Francis a point directly in its favour.

Nor is it universally true that the beggar gains his livelihood without effort. The self-effacement and strain undergone by St. Francis at the beginning of his career of begging have already been noticed, and—since it is not only more blessed, but a great deal more pleasant for the average of men to give than to receive—they constitute an effort which, if it were possible of measurement, might well prove to be greater than the total effort of the average critic of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *e.g.*, L. L. Dubois, S.M., *St. Francis of Assisi, Social Reformer*, New York, 1906, pp. 168-73.

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begging to earn his bread. For St. Francis this effort constituted part of the beggar's right to his sustenance. It was the earnest of his belief, the evidence that he had not embraced the life of the brotherhood from a mere distaste for work. And when he came into contact with a brother who refused to contribute in this manner to his own needs and those of the brethren, he dismissed him forthwith from their company. "Go thy way, brother fly," he said to one such recalcitrant, "for thou wouldst eat the sweat of thy brethren and be idle in God's work. Thou art like brother drone who though he endures not the toil of the bees wants to be the first to eat the honey."<sup>1</sup> St. Francis and his companions do not seem to have been formed in a different mould from other men as regards their natural reluctance, and the overcoming of this is in itself a magnificent tribute to their force and sincerity.

And, at the end of the count, the labourer is worthy of his hire, and the charge of giving nothing in return for what they received cannot be brought against St. Francis and his followers. He realized himself that a genuine interchange took place between the brethren and the community. If a return were to be demanded, the brotherhood should be able to show that they had not only received, yet that which they returned was in a different currency from that which they were given. "There are mutual obligations between the world and the brethren," he would say; "they owe to the world a good example, the world owes them the provision of necessities."<sup>2</sup> And, for himself, he gave not some few hours a day in return for what he received, but his whole skill, his whole energy, his whole life. If it be a matter of repayment, he gave with overwhelming generosity in return for his scant living, in the inspiration which his life was and has been for his own and all the succeeding

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 75; *Mirror*, xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 70.



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generations. "Bread of alms," he would say, summing up his whole philosophy of begging and its value, "is angel's food,"<sup>1</sup> and in return for it he gave something which came from a source even higher than the angels.

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, vii, 8. Cf. *Mirror*, xxiii.



## Chapter Seven

**P**OVERTY IS NOT CONCERNED, HOWEVER, with the world of material things only. Its desirability from the mystical standpoint resides in its power to prevent attachment to and dependence on anything less than the pure spirit of God as final, and it has therefore an application to all the parts of man's personality. It is in this way the underlying principle of all the three monastic vows, and gives their meaning to both obedience and chastity. They are equally cases of non-attachment to the personal demand of one aspect of man: obedience substitutes, it has been seen, the divine for the personal will, and chastity is aimed at the deflection of the main current of interest, attention, and desire from the emotions and their claims. As a separate division of the general process of revaluation which is the essence of the mystic's attempt, poverty relates to the mind both in the sense of the mental attitude which has been seen to be necessary for literal poverty to be productive, and in a more exact sense as well.

Just as obedience stood for the subjugation of the personal to the divine will, so poverty stands for the subjugation of the intellect to the spirit. If the mystic allows no dependence on anything which is less than God, he cannot permit a final trust in the intellect. He recognizes, it would seem, that its domination is as dangerous as, and more subtle than, the admittedly undesirable domination by the body.<sup>1</sup> And since he claims the overshadowing of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g., *Theologia Germanica*, chap. xx: "Now, nothing is so comfortable and pleasant to nature, as a free, careless way of life, therefore

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all the parts by the spirit, he is driven to asking that the intellect may be considered in its proper place as one of the servitors of that king. He does not ask for its annihilation any more than he asks for what would be quite impossible of fulfilment, the annihilation of the will, because he is fully aware of the need for the co-operation of all the parts and aspects of man. His aim is to arrange them in their fit and proper places—giving each their due and despising none, but also not exaggerating the importance of any to the detriment of their true ruler. It is in the defence of this desire that he meets with the strenuous opposition of all those who owe allegiance to the sovereign reason, and know no greater king.

Speaking very broadly the mystic has two lines of defence for his position, the one *a priori* and the other *a posteriori*. That which is postulated as the goal of life and the purpose of manifested existence is the knowledge of God, and life is therefore to be arranged with this achievement for its sole end. Whatever is likely to make for success will be encouraged above all else, but no one of the many contributing factors will be unduly exalted. To claim that reason can arrive by its own efforts at the knowledge of God is to presuppose that reason is capable of comprehending what is conceived as infinite, a position which disregards the possibility of there being truths which are, by their very nature, above the sphere of reason. For to say that a thing is impossible *because* it is unreasonable is to say that man's reason is co-extensive with the

she clingeth to that, and taketh enjoyment in herself and her own powers, and looketh only to her own peace and comfort and the like. And this happeneth most of all, where there are high natural gifts of reason, for that soareth upwards in its own light and by its own power, till at last it cometh to think itself the True Eternal Light, and giveth itself out as such, and is thus deceived in itself, and deceiveth other people along with it, who know no better, and also are thereunto inclined."

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divine possibilities, and there do not appear to be any data on which to base such a supposition. The conception of the universal spirit confined within the narrow limitations of a human intellect is too suggestive of a God made in the image of man to commend itself to the mystic. His point is not necessarily to argue that the highest truth must be unreasonable, but to suggest emphatically that it may be so—that its being unreasonable is not in itself a proof of a thing's untruth.

The view of the mystic in general, then, is that reason may to a great degree prepare the way, but it cannot reach the goal by its own efforts. He does not condemn it as such or totally despise it; he does not attempt its abolition but insists on the fact of its limitation. It is evident, for example, that when there are strong intellectual grounds for a disbelief in the possibility of spiritual life—which possibility is the kernel of mysticism—one of the best methods of combating those objections will be the use of reason itself. It may clear the ground of rational hindrances, as it fights the adversary with his own weapons, but at the most it will produce an intellectual conviction and not a vivid knowledge. To know any of the great spiritual truths intellectually is of a certain value in preparing the way to the real and intimate knowledge which may follow it, but in respect of efficacy and force it pales before such intimate knowledge as a rushlight before the sun. The one is a knowledge of the mind, but the other a knowledge of the whole being, with the additional force of the spirit which impels the whole being into the course demanded by such a knowledge.

The advance of reason unaided towards the things of the spirit is a cold, pallid, tentative thing: it recoils at the first touch of what it seeks in fear of violating its own postulates, and lacks that whole-hearted and abundant vitality which is the real condition of success in the quest.

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Reason can prepare the form with infinite cunning, and surround it with proofs of its accuracy and an over-sufficiency of reasons why it, and it alone, must be final and complete, but without some other inspiration the form remains rigid and cold. Into it must be breathed the fire of something other than itself, at whose advent the statue is touched to life. The incapacity by its very nature of the unaided reason to cognize the ultimate reality is thus the line of *a priori* defence.

The alternative argument is simply an appeal to experience. What is the condition in which the knowledge of God is gained according to the testimony of generations of mystics? Contemplation. What is the distinguishing characteristic of contemplation? Definitions of it abound throughout the centuries. St. Augustine speaks of it as a joyful admiration of a clear truth; St. Bernard as an elevation of the mind suspended in God, tasting the delights of an everlasting sweetness; Richard of St. Victor as a free discernment of the mind, which is in a state of suspension through admiration of the spectacle presented by the divine wisdom; St. Thomas as a simple looking upon the truth.<sup>1</sup> Scaramelli's definition is that contemplation is an elevation of the mind of God, or in things which are divine, with a simple look of admiration and love of those things.<sup>2</sup> Finally, Father Doyle, following the teaching of Schram, defines contemplation as "the uplifting of the soul to God by a simple intuition full of affection."<sup>3</sup> The quality which is brought out in common by all these definitions is that in contemplation there is no use of the intellect—the mind is in a state of suspension and the sight of the truth is a clear sight presented without intellectual effort.

<sup>1</sup> See Scaramelli, *Il Direttorio Mistico*, tratt. ii, cap. iv, sec. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, iv, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *A Manual of Mystical Theology*, by the Rev. A. Devine, chap. iii, p. 29.



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But it is admitted on all hands that a state of contemplation is reached as a rule after a considerable period of preparation, and it is into this period that the use of the intellect enters. The proper preparation for contemplation is meditation—"Meditation sows, and Contemplation reaps: Meditation seeks and Contemplation finds: Meditation prepares the Food, Contemplation savours it and feeds on it"<sup>1</sup>—and the point in which the one is distinguished from the other is that whereas in meditation the truth is sought with repeated acts of the intellect and the imagination, in contemplation the truth is simply seen without effort.<sup>2</sup> "It differs from meditation," says Father Doyle, "in that it is made without reasoning, without the use of sensible images . . . by a pure, quiet, simple operation of the mind which we call intuition."<sup>3</sup> The two are compared by Scaramelli to the condition of the audience in a theatre before and after the raising of the curtain. In the first case they will search with their minds the probable details of the scene they are about to see, and will all arrive at more or less different conclusions as a result of the intellectual method. But when the curtain is raised they will all see, simply by looking and without further effort, the scene in its entirety.<sup>4</sup>

Thus is the mystic convinced of the utility of the reason in the preparatory stages, and of its final inutility for the cognition of the ultimate verities, both by the argument from the nature of the mind and by the appeal to recorded experience.

Singularly enough, his position has received unlooked-for support from a source in which, generally speaking, the emphasis is laid on the power of the intellect in all ultimate enquiries. Whereas the mystic has desired to know God

<sup>1</sup> Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, Preface, sec. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Scaramelli, *op. cit.*, ii, iv, 35.

<sup>3</sup> See Devine, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Scaramelli, *op. cit.*, ii, iv, 36.

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by actual experience, the philosopher has sought to know about Him by all the means of which his intellect was capable, and yet it is from the side of philosophy that the support has come. The name of M. Bergson stands for a degree of fearless thought which has seldom been reached, and though his suggestions have not been received with overwhelming gratitude by his *confrères* as a whole, they have yet to be disproved. It is a case of intellect, lit up, it may be, with the touch of something yet higher than itself, dealing with intellect, and showing its limitations; and between M. Bergson's conclusions and those of the mystics it may be possible to find a considerable measure of agreement.

The foundation of his position is that "originally we think only in order to act. Our intellect has been cast in the mould of action." Taking man, that is, as an organism living in a material world, M. Bergson conceives him as having been under the necessity of applying himself to gaining a certain control over it in order to continue in existence; and his intellect as having therefore applied itself to acting on that by which he was surrounded, both for defence and nourishment. "Speculation is a luxury, while action is a necessity."<sup>1</sup> The intellect, therefore, aims first of all at constructing—at using inert matter for whatever its purpose may be. Now whatever be the final truth about matter, it is evident that for the intellect to be able to act on it, it must regard it as cut up into so many blocks which it can use in its construction. If it were to regard it, for example, as being in a perpetually fluidic state, it could no more use it for the purposes of construction than it could make use of a river for that purpose. Its natural procedure, then, is to decompose the material world into whatever parts are most convenient for it, and to regard

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, p. 46.

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these as provisionally final divisions—to treat them as so many units of which it can make use. Its action is therefore discontinuous—there is, that is to say, no continuity between one of the units it isolates and another—and it is only of the discontinuous, the immobile, that the intellect forms a clear idea. It is not specifically concerned with the continual flow of things, with their progress, just because its natural purpose is action; but in place of the continual flow it can range in succession a lot of unmoving things and so, in some sense, reconstruct the flow, and in place of a thing's progress it can see quite clearly the goal towards which that thing is moving. "The intellect," that is, "is characterized by the unlimited power of decomposing according to any law, and of recomposing into any system."<sup>1</sup>

Now it is just because the natural function of the intellect is to render action possible, and just because action is only possible when the material world is regarded by the intellect as composed of so many stable units, that the intellect finds itself seriously handicapped when it attempts to apply itself to other things than action. Take, for example, its effort to deal with ideas. M. Bergson's theory is that the characteristic of human language is that the signs of which it is composed can be applied to more than one thing. It is not, as he suggests is the case with the animal, composed of a series of signs of which each refers to one thing and one thing only—it is a series of signs each of which is applicable to any number of things, and can pass from one thing to another. This mobility of the human language is the cause of the intelligence which employs it being able to pass, not only from one thing to another, but also—instead of being "riveted to the material objects which it was interested in considering"—from a perceived thing to a recollection of that thing: to think about the thing instead of thinking the thing, and so, eventually, to pass to

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 162-5.

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an idea of the thing. Language has, in fact, enabled man to have ideas, to theorize about things, and M. Bergson believes that this capacity to theorize is peculiar to man's intellect.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulty is that the intellect, having been shaped on action, naturally brings to its dealings with ideas the procedure which it used for action. Just as it regarded matter as being composed of so many discontinuous units, so it must, "to think itself clearly and distinctly, perceive itself under the form of discontinuity." Its concepts are outside of and distinct from each other; they are each isolated and individual, as were the provisional units into which it divided up matter, and it is therefore absolutely unable to think continuity. To put it in another way—the intellect is absolutely unable to think becoming: the nearest it can get to it is to think of a series of states (which are the units into which it has divided up becoming, so that it can comprehend it) and to reconstitute from them the becoming. But it is evident that such a procedure will never give it an idea of becoming as it really is: it is a substitution of a number of fixed and given units for a continuity which is always progressing. If life (as M. Bergson thinks) be essentially a becoming; a continual creation of something new as the past eats into the future and produces an ever-disappearing present; if life, that is, be characterized by this new thing that is always coming into existence, it is clear that the intellect can never grasp it. Directly the new thing has come into existence the intellect can grasp it readily enough, but its coming evades that faculty altogether.<sup>2</sup>

The simile of the cinematograph perhaps shows this more clearly than could any other. Just as the cinematograph reproduces an appearance of life by means of a series

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 166-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-74.

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of snapshots on a film, plus the movement inside the machine itself, so the intellect divides up any becoming into a series of states which are virtually snapshots of life, each separate and isolated from the other; and then, with the help of the general idea of becoming—which it has got from observation and is the equivalent of the movement inside the machine—it reproduces the actual becoming itself. It is clear that this reproduction has very little connection with the real becoming: the general idea of becoming that has been obtained from observation teaches nothing of the actual transition itself. It is the link that the intellect uses to join up the successive states into which it has divided becoming, but of that becoming—of the transition, of what happens between one state or snapshot and another—it can tell nothing whatever.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion, it has been seen, is that “the intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life,” inasmuch as life is essentially this perpetual becoming.<sup>2</sup>

It is this inadequacy of the reason to comprehend the vital things that is the common theme of mysticism. Ruysbroeck is particularly insistent upon it, as when he says that because certain things “begin and terminate in that endless essence which is an abyss, reason and consideration fail; . . . at the sight of God, reason succumbs and fails. It sees something, but what? It cannot tell; for the faculty of understanding is lifted up into a kind of knowledge without mode or form of any kind.”<sup>3</sup> “This rapid descent which God requires of us is simply an immersion in the abyss of the Divinity, incomprehensible to the intellect; but where the intellect stops short, love advances and goes in.”<sup>4</sup> And again he speaks of the seventh degree

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 320 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Reflections from the Mirror of a Mystic* (translated by Earle Baillie), pp. 27-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.



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of love as being reached when, "above all comprehension and all knowledge, we find in ourselves a bottomless not-knowing."<sup>1</sup> An English treatise on contemplation takes the same attitude. God is "incomprehensible to all created knowledgeable powers, as is angel, or man's soul; I mean, by their knowing, and not by their loving. . . . But yet all reasonable creatures, angel and man, have in them each one by himself, one principal working power, the which is called a knowledgeable power, and another principal working power, the which is called a loving power. Of the which two powers, to the first, the which is a knowledgeable power, God that is the maker of them is evermore incomprehensible."<sup>2</sup> And later: "He may well be loved but not thought. By love may He be gotten and holden; but by thought never."<sup>3</sup> But in truth such statements abound throughout the literature of mysticism, and it would be to labour the point unnecessarily to cite further examples.

But if man be debarred by the limitations of his intellect from a comprehension of anything more ultimate than these *disjecta membra* of life, is he thereby condemned to an unending ignorance of the real which lies behind them? Is there no other faculty which may supersede the intellect, by means of which he may penetrate into a region to which the intellect has no entry?

M. Bergson comes forward with the suggestion that such a faculty does not lie without the bounds of possibility, and bases his belief on a prolonged consideration of the characteristics of instinct and intelligence. His conclusion is that they are divergent directions of one original impulse and not successive degrees of one tendency: but just because they were together in the original impulse of life

<sup>1</sup> *Of the Seven Steps in the Ascent of Spiritual Love*, chap. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, chap. iv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. vi.

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they still retain something of their common origin. They are never found, that is, entirely distinct from one another, but they imply two radically different kinds of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> The line of argument is that in the case of instinct the knowledge displayed is in one sense unconscious—with the kind of unconsciousness that is the result of the action being precisely co-equal with the representation of it. Thus, for example, it is perfectly true that anyone who is doing something very intently is for the moment unconscious of the fact that he is doing it, and will continue unconscious of it while his intentness lasts, or until some interruption occurs which makes him immediately conscious of what he *was* doing. In this sense consciousness is “the inadequacy of act to representation,” in that a man represents himself to himself as doing the act when the act is not enough to take up all his attention. Such a condition, in which the man may hesitate and choose between one alternative and another, is the natural product of intelligence, but for instinct the normal condition is one where the action coincides with the power of representation, and it therefore tends to unconsciousness.<sup>2</sup> It will be remembered that intellect was said to be characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life: instinct, on the other hand, is said to be modelled on life itself; to be of one piece with the life that organizes matter. It does not, that is, go outside of life (which is becoming) and take snapshots of it, but remains in life and is in the becoming itself. Both instinct and intelligence are forms of the one principle which is life, but while intelligence goes outside that principle and looks at it, so to speak, instinct remains in it and coincides with its work.<sup>3</sup> But intellect is conscious, though it has lost its oneness with life thereby, while instinct has retained that oneness and so has a much greater and more

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 142, 143, 150.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174, 177.

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intimate knowledge, although it is unconscious. M. Bergson suggests that this is the explanation of the fact that animals appear to have so great an intelligence, but that instead of crediting them with intelligence, it would be better to regard them as having a kind of sympathy which enables them to act with an intimate knowledge, but without consciousness. It is a faculty which does not rest on outward perception, but expresses the relation of one activity to another. It discerns from within, just as intellect remains outside, and it resembles in some way what we feel in ourselves from time to time when we have feelings of sympathy and antipathy without reflection. In our case the intuition, the divining sympathy, is conscious—it is represented, that is, to ourselves; but in the case of instinct it is lived rather than represented—acted rather than known.<sup>1</sup>

M. Bergson's point is this. That which we regard as instinct or this sympathy in animals, is in man intuition: it is the same thing "become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely." It has all the closeness to life that has the animal's instinct; all the unreasoning power of knowledge that an animal has; all the quickness of arrival at the important point that an animal has; but in addition it is conscious. To take an actual case of it: the intention of life escapes our intellect, but this intention "is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model." It is obviously not by an intellectual effort that he does it; it is rather by a piercing through by means of the faculty that has been called intuition. This is admittedly a case which affects the individual only, but the suggestion is that if an inquiry were turned in the

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 183-5.

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same direction as art, which would take life in general as its object, it might succeed in supplying precisely what the intellect misses. Intuition might utilize the intellect to prove to it its own limitations, and might even suggest a vague feeling of what must take its place. And further, "by the sympathetic communication which it establishes between us and the rest of the living, by the expansion of consciousness which it brings about, it introduces us into life's own domain, which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation."<sup>1</sup>

Now, it would seem that this describes precisely what the mystics have been doing for as long as the records speak of them, and precisely what has been the essence of all their efforts. Their history is the history of a succession of attempts to pierce behind the veil of appearance, and first to penetrate into, and then to live within, the reality which lies behind. In the sentence of M. Bergson last quoted are contained the two large directions of their efforts and their achievement. The "introduction into life's own domain" stands for the mystic's penetration into the life in the one underlying Reality which for him is God: the living in the ceaseless becoming of life, for his experience of the still rest and the unceasing activity at the Centre. Further, when M. Bergson speaks of the "sympathetic communication which it (intuition) establishes between us and the rest of the living" it sounds as the very echo of a state common to unnumbered mystics. It is one of the most striking sides of St. Francis;<sup>2</sup> the awakening of Brother Lawrence came about by what was, in effect, such a sympathetic communication between his own inmost life and that of a leafless tree,<sup>3</sup> and it has at all times been the common experience of mystics of a certain type. Of Boehme it has

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 186-7.

<sup>2</sup> See below, chap. xviii.

<sup>3</sup> *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Conversation 1.

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been said that " he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass, and that actual Nature harmonized with what he had inwardly seen "; that " viewing the herbs and grass of the field in his inward light, he saw into their essences, use and properties, which were discovered to him by their lineaments, figures and signatures." <sup>1</sup> Blake knew that a tree could move some men to tears of joy; <sup>2</sup> to Tennyson and Wordsworth the flower in the crannied wall and the primrose by the river's brim conveyed hints of the vaster life which was behind them all.

To go, however, a step farther with M. Bergson's consideration of the intellect and that which may supersede it. It will be remembered that both intelligence and instinct are said to have sprung from one and the same principle, and that in the case of intelligence that principle specialized, so to speak, on matter, while the other branch specialized on its own movement. This other branch of the principle was rightly intuition, but it appears that by the necessity it was under of concerning itself with the actual life with which it was occupied, it became incapable of consciousness in the sense in which M. Bergson uses the word, and therefore shrank down to instinct. But in intellect, whatever its disadvantages, it was at any rate free of matter, inasmuch as it was outside itself, and it has therefore the power to " turn inwards on itself, and awaken the potentialities of intuition which still slumber within it." <sup>3</sup>

Before considering the question of the awakening of these potentialities, it will make for clearness to consider for a moment what is meant by this principle which is conceived as passing through things, and manifesting in one case as intelligence and in another as instinct. It is said to be consciousness, but not " the narrowed conscious-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Miss Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of William Blake*, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Creative Evolution*, p. 192.



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ness that functions in each of us." It is not the individual consciousness, but a larger thing with which the individual consciousness can, in certain circumstances, coincide, of which the individual consciousness is, as it were, a part only.<sup>1</sup> Intellect is a kind of local concentration in the ocean of life—it is the nucleus of a wider reality—but just because it does not differ radically from its principle which surrounds it, it can be reabsorbed therein. It may, as it is said, "live back again its own genesis," a process which will end by "expanding the humanity in us and making us even transcend it."<sup>2</sup> Between such a conception and that of the mystics themselves there is a similarity on which, by reason of its obviousness, it would be superfluous to insist. It speaks in the mystics' own accents: it is one with their view of the individual consciousness as part of a wider consciousness which is the one real and truly living thing, in which the individual consciousness may be reabsorbed by a process of expansion so that in the end the limitations of humanity as it is generally known may veritably be transcended. It may seem, though, as it is a question of going beyond the intelligence and as the intelligence is the one clear thing in man's consciousness, that it is a contradiction in terms to speak of going beyond it, for the evident reason that as man is inside his own thought he cannot get out of it. The answer suggested by M. Bergson is the answer that has been given almost unanimously by the mystics. It is, in a word, that "reason, reasoning on its powers, will never succeed in extending them"—that instead of discussing whether it be possible to know otherwise than by intelligence, the step must be taken of leaving reason merely, and thrusting "intelligence outside itself by an act of will."<sup>3</sup>

But it is the question of the awakening of the potential-

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 202-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 202-4.

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ties of intuition that is of the greatest interest for mysticism. It is improbable that M. Bergson can suggest any more precise directions as to how this is to be effected than can be found already in the mystics, but his suggestions constitute a peculiarly close parallel to their recommendations. The awakening is to come by the intellect turning inwards on itself, and the suggestion is that the intuition which is thus aroused may supply precisely what the intellect misses. Is this not word for word the doctrine of introversion—the conviction that man must go within himself and there find the key of all riddles?<sup>1</sup> In one of the innumerable passages where Ruysbroeck speaks of contemplation reaching a super-intellectual knowledge, he represents it as fulfilling exactly the same function as M. Bergson ascribes to intuition. “Contemplation is a knowing without mode, for ever abiding above the reason. Never can it descend therein, and above it can the reason never ascend. The shining forth of That which hath no mode is as a fair mirror wherein there shineth the Everlasting Light of God. It is without attributes, and therein all the workings of the reason fail.”<sup>2</sup>

M. Bergson does not, however, confine himself to these suggestions, but expands the idea in words which bear an ever-increasing resemblance to the language of mysticism. “The effort we make to transcend the pure understanding introduces us into that more vast something out of which our understanding is cut, and from which it has detached itself. . . . Into this reality we shall get back more and more completely, in proportion as we compel ourselves to transcend pure intelligence.” Man gets back, that is, into the ocean of life—the *vastissimum divinitatis pelagus* of

<sup>1</sup> See Miss Underhill, *Mysticism*, pp. 362 *et seq.*, for a number of quotations from the mystics expressive of this conviction.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of the Twelve Béguines* (translated by John Francis), chap. viii

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Ruysbroeck—of which his own understanding is an isolated part, but which is, nevertheless, his rightful place. "Let us then," he continues, "concentrate attention on that which we have that is at the same time the most removed from externality and the least penetrated with intellectuality. Let us seek, in the depths of our experience, the point where we feel ourselves most intimately within our own life. It is into pure duration that we then plunge back, a duration in which the past, always moving on, is swelling unceasingly with a present that is absolutely new. But, at the same time, we feel the spring of our will strained to its utmost limit. We must, by a strong recoil of our personality on itself, gather up our past which is slipping away, in order to thrust it, compact and undivided, into a present which it will create by entering. Rare indeed are the moments when we are self-possessed to this extent: it is then that our actions are truly free. And even at these moments we do not completely possess ourselves. Our feeling of duration, I should say the actual coinciding of ourself with itself, admits of degrees. But the more the feeling is deep and the coincidence complete, the more the life in which it replaces us absorbs intellectuality by transcending it."<sup>1</sup> The similarity of this recommendation to those of the mystics for whom the ingoing of contemplation was an accomplished fact, needs no emphasis.

But still further. It will be remembered that the individual consciousness has been said to be able to coincide somewhat with that principle which passes through things, which is, in reality, a larger consciousness. The means by which it does this is "to detach itself from the already-made and attach itself to the being-made. It needs that, turning back on itself and twisting on itself, the faculty of seeing should be made to be one with the act of willing—

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 210-11.

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a painful effort which we can make suddenly, doing violence to our nature, but cannot sustain more than a few moments." Without forcing parallels where they are not legitimate, is not this detachment from the already-made, the past, that is, very close to the clearing the mind of all sensible images—the keeping the "thoughts bare and stripped of every sensible image," the "understanding opened and lovingly uplifted to the Eternal Truth"—of Ruysbroeck when he is speaking of contemplation? He says that the result will be that the "spirit spread out in the sight of God as a living mirror" will be ready to receive the divine likeness.<sup>1</sup> M. Bergson says that a dim consciousness is gained—"we brush it lightly as it passes," as he puts it—of the pure willing that communicates life to matter, and further, that it is possible to get to this principle of all things, this larger consciousness, by precisely that faculty of which the awakening is under discussion—namely, intuition.<sup>2</sup> This mention of the pure willing that communicates life to matter finds a curious parallel in Boehme, who uses the phrase continually. Speaking, for example, of the source of the fire, he says: "There is nothing in herself but a willing of the eternal Father in the eternal nature which he hath appointed in himself to reveal . . . and that will is eternal and is not stirred up by anything but by itself." And again, "Enter into the way of love . . . and then you are in Christ, born in God, and attain the divine will."<sup>3</sup>

This consciousness of the pure willing, then, says M. Bergson, is gained by intuition, and he goes on to say precisely what the mystics have always said with regard to their apprehension of knowledge by a means which is above that of the logical understanding. Their cry has

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the Twelve Béguines*, Chap. ix, Part I.

<sup>2</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 250-1.

<sup>3</sup> *The Threefold Life of Man*, chap. i, 23-4, and chap. iv, 53.

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always been that they cannot bring down into the terms of reason what they have experienced in a plane above reason, and M. Bergson testifies that the intuition must be broken up into concepts that it may be propagated to other men, but that all that such breaking up will probably do is "to develop the result of that intuition which transcends it," and that "the effort, by which ideas are connected with ideas, causes the intuition which the ideas were storing up to vanish." Now this intuition is an intuition of the truth, and, he claims, there is only one truth, so that for all who have gained this intuition disagreement is impossible. Such a suggestion is reminiscent of Saint-Martin's remark that all mystics speak the same language, for they come from the same country, and it would seem that this language is the same just because it is the language of truth, which it may be admitted amounts to saying that it is the language of God. In this intuition of truth reality is felt to be perpetual growth, according to M. Bergson; a conception which has been noticed to bear a close resemblance to the mystic's ceaseless activity at the Centre; and later he speaks of a centre "as a continuity of shooting out," not as a thing, and God as "unceasing life, action, freedom."<sup>1</sup> Not unduly to labour the point, it may be sufficient to recall Boehme's idea of the centre from which all things are generated, and "how the eternal Word was in the beginning (as in the centre) and the Word is God's, and the eternal will is that Word."<sup>2</sup> For the rest, similar passages may be found in almost every chapter of Boehme's writings.

Intuition, then, remains in a vague and discontinuous state in man, capable of being aroused at moments and of giving us glimpses of Truth and Reality. By it also, however, M. Bergson holds, "is revealed the unity of the

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 251-2 and 262.

<sup>2</sup> *The Threefold Life of Man*, chap. ii, 6.



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spiritual life," for "intuition is in a certain sense life itself"—in other words, there is in man a dormant reality which is one with the great and continuous Reality, and when it is awakened can cognize that Reality. But this unity of the spiritual life can only be recognized "when we place ourselves in intuition in order to go from intuition to the intellect, for from the intellect we shall never pass to intuition."<sup>1</sup> Or, as Boehme and countless others have said: "We must wholly reject our own reason, and not regard the dissembling flattering art of this world, it is not available to help us to that light; but it is a mere leading astray, and keeping of us back."<sup>2</sup>

A conception is thus arrived at of a life behind all manifestation, flowing ceaselessly through all things, "subdividing itself into individuals . . . so that souls are continually being created which, nevertheless, in a certain sense pre-existed," as M. Bergson puts it—a consciousness which is essentially free, but must adapt itself to the matter through which it passes, and this life is one and indivisible, as for the mystic is the spirit.<sup>3</sup> And it is of this life that man may become conscious by intuition, and it is this intuition which exists in him, but in a vague and discontinuous state. Now, apart from the insistence of the mystic on the inadequacy of the intellect to cognize the ultimate things, is there in the literature of mysticism any suggestion of a faculty which is to replace it, and so correspond with M. Bergson's intuition? The answer must be an unhesitating affirmative. "We must therefore have a sensorium fitted for such communication," says Eckartshausen, "an organized and spiritual sensorium, a spiritual and interior faculty able to receive this light; but it is closed . . . to most men by the incrustation of the senses.

<sup>1</sup> *Creative Evolution*, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> *The Threefold Life of Man*, chap. v, 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Creative Evolution*, pp. 284-5.

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Such an interior organ is the intuitive sense of the transcendental world, and until this intuitive sense is effective in us we can have no certainty of more lofty truths." It would be difficult to imagine a more exact description of M. Bergson's faculty of intuition by which man is enabled to grasp that which escapes the intellect. He has spoken of it as existing vaguely and discontinuously—Eckartshausen speaks of the spiritual sensorium as having been "naturally inactive since the Fall, which relegated man to the world of physical sense," and of the opening of this spiritual sensorium as being "the mystery of the New Man—the mystery of Regeneration, and of the vital union between God and man."<sup>1</sup>

The conclusion is, then, that this vague and discontinuous intuition is the faculty by which, when it has become clear and continuous, the union between God and man is effected, and it is precisely this clear and continuous consciousness of God which is the characteristic of the union in its perfected state of the Spiritual Marriage.<sup>2</sup> Inasmuch, in M. Bergson's language, as the intellect is fashioned for action, it does not constitute a faculty which sees in order to see, but one which sees in order to act. But if it be possible to get to Being direct by the use of the faculty of intuition, if man can see in order to see instead of seeing in order to act, "the Absolute is revealed very near us and, in a certain measure, in us. It lives with us."<sup>3</sup> Could there be a more precise statement of the very essence of mysticism?

These convictions as to the limitations of the intellect being, as it were, part of the heritage to which the mystic is

<sup>1</sup> *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, Letter I, pp. 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> See St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle, Seventh Mansions*; Delacroix, *Etudes d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, pp. 55-8, 250-3, 416-7; Scaramelli, *Il Direttorio Mistico*, tratt. iii. cap. xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Creative Evolution*, p. 315.

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born, the ultimate supersession of that faculty is inevitably among the chief of his aims. His purpose is not to be irrational for the sake of unreason, but finally to be super-rational, and when he reaches this state human unreason is no longer a bar to belief. In a sphere where the phenomena do not fall within the category of a lower sphere, it is not the phenomena that are denied, but the category, with all due reverence to its efficacy in its proper place. But because of the tendency of the intellect to usurp the highest place of government and install itself as the supreme ruler, and because of the excess of attention that may easily be given to the intellect simply as intellect—as an end in itself, instead of one of the means—the mystic is armed with an insistence on its limitations.



## *Chapter Eight*

**T**HE CONTINUAL EFFORTS OF ST. Francis to protect himself and his followers from the danger of an unaided intellectualism must take their place among his most characteristic endeavours. It was on his part an impulse rooted in his very nature, and his adversary was the tendency of a large number of his brethren to wish to take their place with the members of more learned Orders. There is unfortunately no doubt that the struggle became a bitter one before the end, but it is equally certain that in his own case at any rate St. Francis preserved the directness and simplicity of character which he valued so highly.

It may be that the part of his nature which was essentially the poet in him inclined him naturally to such a view. He was not, on that account, careless of fact or unconcerned with accuracy, but the plain skeleton of any circumstances would be insufficient to satisfy him. A mere mental process, untinged by any of the deeper colourings of life, would not answer the poet's demands: the acquisition of learning unsuffused by some greater vitality could not but leave him cold and discontent. For though the poet does not disregard facts, he considers them as the foundation only of his building. Thus St. Francis, inasmuch as he was a poet by temperament—and this was to no little degree—was unable and unwilling to amass learning for its own sake, and considered himself to the end of his life as a simple and unlettered man. The Bishop of Acre, who saw him arrive in the Holy Land and make his amazing

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attempt at the conversion of the Sultan, attested his simplicity and his little evidence of learning, as well as the loveliness of his character and the affection with which he seemed to be regarded both by God and man.<sup>1</sup> There was a something other than intellectual acquirements which radiated from him and impressed all who saw him—a something which was the foundation of his success and his astonishing influence over men.

Certain of St. Francis' biographers have been at pains to prove that his contempt for learning has been over-emphasized and that his simplicity has been exaggerated by tradition. But there is no reason to suppose that St. Francis' references to his own ignorance in comparison with the professed scholars are founded upon anything but fact. Such ignorance would not make of him a fool—since lack of intellectual knowledge does not mean dullness of mind—but an enthusiast whose views of the desirability of learning differed from those of his biographers. It has been suggested, for example, that the implications contained in St. Bonaventure that St. Francis was "wanting in culture" may be due to his repeated reference to his own ignorance, and to the fact that such references were grounded in his great humility.<sup>2</sup> The objections to such a view are that St. Bonaventure was himself acquainted with St. Francis,<sup>3</sup> and so quite capable of judging as to the amount of learning he possessed, and that to suppose St. Francis guilty of wilful misstatement on this or any fact is to go against the whole trend of his life. It is perhaps even more difficult now than it was in the thirteenth century, to believe that the kingdom of heaven is not attainable by reason alone, but the conditions of entrance into that kingdom are probably enough unchanged.

To St. Francis, therefore, whose whole being longed to

<sup>1</sup> See W. J. Knox Little, *St. Francis of Assisi* (1897), pp. 169, 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



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accomplish that self-annihilation which would open the gates to the incoming of the Divine, intellectualism presented a very evident danger. There is a pride in learning which is more diabolical as it is more subtle than the pride of other possessions. It does not debar others from equal possession, but it sets up a false standard of judgement into which the spirit enters nowhere. It is the cold, reasoning, unreasonable element of division which puts knowledge in the place of wisdom and judges on a basis of learning instead of on a basis of love. There is no reason to suppose that the self-satisfaction of culture is less deadly than any other variety of self-satisfaction, and there is only too much evidence that it attaches itself to learning with a more poisonous facility than to most other branches of achievement. St. Francis' way of putting it was that "learning makes many men indocile, not suffering a certain stiffness of theirs to be bent by the discipline of humility"; and his view was that a lettered man should retire for some time and gather together the scattered energies of his heart, that he might reform his soul for better things, and that when such a redirection of his life had taken place he might the better utilize all that he had previously amassed in the way of learning.<sup>1</sup> He saw the likelihood of glorying in learning for its own sake, which is not only the sacrifice of the spirit to the letter, but the prostitution of a human faculty for the production of a definite evil. He speaks of those whose aim is only to know the words that they may gain a reputation for learning among others, as being killed by the letter, as were those who concerned themselves with the ingenious interpretation of the Bible, rather than the accomplishment of its teaching. There was in his mind a clear distinction between an intellectual appreciation of its message, and the understanding which showed

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 194.

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forth in action; and the difference between the two was the difference between death and life.<sup>1</sup>

A famous passage in the *Mirror of Perfection* brings out this fear of a mental appreciation in place of enthusiastic activity with particular distinctness. St. Francis was arguing with the novice who was anxious to possess a psalter of his own, and trying to show him that it would be at any rate an unwise thing to do. Apart from the sense of ownership it would produce, with all the deplorable effects of such a sense, it was too suggestive of an inactive position to commend itself. Charles the Emperor, he said, and Roland and Oliver, and all great men, had achieved their exploits with a valiant directness and splendour of effort, and now there were many people who were anxious to have honour and praise for simply reading about what they had done. Similarly there were many who would have honour by reading and talking about what the saints had done, and this he feared would be the fate of the novice if the psalter were allowed. "As much knowledge hath a man as he doth work" was the summing-up of his opinion,<sup>2</sup> and consistently therewith he discouraged discussion of the martyrdom of the five brethren in Morocco, although the fact of it gave him so acute a pleasure.<sup>3</sup>

The incident of the expulsion of the brethren from their house at Bologna has already been mentioned as an example of the severity with which he treated any inclination to swerve from literal non-possession. But into this particular case there entered another consideration which offended equally against his conviction as to the danger of learning. The house was intended either to become a school itself, or to be a place where the brothers could live and attend the already existing schools of the university. In either case it

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 11, Admonition 7. Cf. Bonaventure, xi, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, iv.

<sup>3</sup> Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. vi, pp. 300-2.

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stood for the learning of the schools as against the intimate knowledge from experience which was, to St. Francis, the one thing desirable, and the anger and contempt which he poured out on those who were responsible for it show how keenly he felt this attempt at a departure from his principles.<sup>1</sup> That he should have gone to the length of cursing Peter Stacia is amazing in such a character, but the incident is paralleled by the occasion at the Chapter of the Mats, when certain of the brethren tried to persuade him to alter his Rule so that it should become more like the Rules of the learned Orders. His answer was final. He utterly refused to grant their wishes, and after explaining that his was the way of simplicity, broke out: "With this learning and wisdom of yours, may the Lord confound you, and I trust in the castellans of the Lord that through them God will punish you, and that you will return to your vocation for all your fault-finding, whether you will or no."<sup>2</sup> In such ways did he convey by implication a rebuke to those throughout the length and breadth of the Church who were giving way to a tendency to amass learning, which was particularly rife at that period.<sup>3</sup> His whole life was a continual reproof to the encouragement by the Church of learning for its own sake, and a vindication of the truth that the final power does not lie with the mind alone. "With God," he would say, "there is no acceptance of persons, and the Holy Ghost, the Minister General of the Religion, rests equally on the poor and simple."<sup>4</sup>

But it was not only on account of the ease with which intellectual accomplishment gives way to, or, it may be, produces, a cultured self-satisfaction, that St. Francis distrusted it. With the direct singleness of his character he

<sup>1</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, lxviii, as translated by Cuthbert; *Life*, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> See Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. x, p. 347.

<sup>4</sup> Celano, ii, 193.

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found it difficult to believe that two separate paths could be successfully followed at the same time, and the two paths which caused such searching of heart among the brethren were those of knowledge of the mind and the knowledge of the heart. It is not possible to imagine that St. Francis was so blind to facts as to hold that all working of the mind was dangerous, any more than to conceive him teaching that such working was sufficient without the help of the emotions. An entirely intellectual man, if such a thing can be conceived, would be monstrous: an entirely emotional man would be useless simply because he would be without a directing force. In the event, emotion of one kind or another is the motive force of every life, and so much intellect is desirable as will direct it into the highest channel: it is from their marriage that all good comes. But while it cannot reasonably be doubted that St. Francis realized this and desired to bring about this marriage in himself and his brethren, he unquestionably felt the desire of his time to give undue preference to the intellect alone, and consequently reacted against it. He recognized that there is a certain frigidity in intellectual processes which may easily stop the sources of emotion, and so long as these are checked, there is no help in any place. The intellect cannot love, it can only admire—it cannot adore, it can approve; and where the chilliness of admiration and approval takes the place of the fervour of love and adoration, there is, for the time being, a famine of the essence of life. The fact of his reaction against the exaltation of the intellect must, therefore, be borne in mind when St. Francis' treatment of it is considered.

Thus in his description of the perfect Minister General he draws the picture of a man whose chief concern will be with the spiritual welfare of those under him, and in regard to learning says that he may be allowed to excel in it—a phrase which suggests a certain deprecation of such a gift

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and its possibilities. "Although he may be allowed to excel in the gift of learning he ought in his behaviour rather to bear the image of pious simplicity," are the exact words he is reported to have used; and he makes an especial point of mentioning that the Minister must not collect books, nor occupy himself very much with reading, "lest he be taking from his office what he is spending by anticipation on study."<sup>1</sup>

On an occasion when a Minister asked him for permission to keep a great many books which he had, the answer which St. Francis gave evidenced at once the insistence on non-possession and the belief that their common end was not to be reached by learning. "I neither will, nor ought, nor can, go against my conscience and the perfection of the Holy Gospel which we have professed," he said simply, or (as another biographer has it), "I am not going to lose the book of the Gospel, which I have promised to obey, for the sake of thy books."<sup>2</sup> He could see no need for learning, in fact, and in the Second Rule, after an exhortation against pride and the cares of the world, he said quite definitely that those who are ignorant of letters should not trouble to learn them, but should desire (apparently in some contradistinction thereto) to possess the spirit of the Lord.<sup>3</sup> The passage suggests again that he doubted the possibility of following the interior and what was, to some extent, the exterior way, at the same time, and was willing that the latter should be neglected rather than that the former should be obscured.

It has been suggested that the views held by St. Francis on this subject underwent some change as a result of the great success of St. Anthony of Padua in preaching against the heretics.<sup>4</sup> St. Anthony had taken the habit of the

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 185; *Mirror*, lxxx.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, iii; Celano, ii, 62.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. x. *Writings*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> L. le Monnier, *Histoire de St. François d'Assise* (1889), vol. ii, p. 75.



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Lesser Brethren at the shrine of the martyrs of Morocco, and after a considerable interval had made a sudden and overwhelming reputation as a preacher. He appears to have combined personal enthusiasm with a profound knowledge of theology and the patristic teaching, and it seems reasonable enough that his success should have made a great impression on St. Francis. But it is not so clear that the impression was caused by his learning, or that St. Francis saw reason on that account to change his opinion as to its utility, as the Abbé le Monnier suggests. From all that is known of St. Francis the characteristic which was most likely to have impressed him would be the fire and enthusiasm of St. Anthony's conviction, and it seems likely enough that it was this which caused St. Francis to address him as "my bishop" in the letter which he wrote to him. Learned men were not scarce but enthusiasm was, and the appointment of St. Anthony as a reader of theology at Bologna would therefore probably be the result of the fervour of his life rather than the profundity of his learning. In fact, a passage from the letter of appointment emphasizes St. Francis' anxiety that St. Anthony's learning should not overwhelm the deeper activities of the brethren. "It pleases me that you should read sacred theology to the brethren so long as on account of this study they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer as is ordained in the Rule," he wrote, and when the anxiety with which St. Francis viewed the foundation of a school of teaching at all is recalled, it will be seen that such a recommendation came from his very heart.<sup>1</sup> His was not, however, a dogged unwillingness to give honour to theologians for their learning, so far as that honour was their due, but it rested on their power to make the spirit shine through

<sup>1</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, pp. 303-6, and note 2 on p. 306 for authorities as to the authenticity of the letter. See also *Writings of St. Francis*, by Fr. Paschal Robinson, pp. 180-1.

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the letter. "We ought to honour and reverence all theologians and those who minister to us the most holy Divine Words as those who minister to us spirit and life," he wrote in his will,<sup>1</sup> but for St. Francis the difference was complete between such veneration and the loving sympathy which he extended to those who showed such a simple enthusiasm as Brother Leo. The one he venerated as excelling him in a branch of activity in which he made no effort to compete: the other he loved with all the passionate enthusiasm of his nature.

A sane and wide simplicity was in fact the key to St. Francis' heart. It stood, with him, for singleness of aim, for directness, for frankness; it was the condition in which were possible the complete trust and the absolute freedom from agitation which he possessed himself in so high a degree. It was not concerned with diplomatic intricacies, but rested on entire faith in the over-ruling of God: it was the antithesis of complication or an exaggerated subtlety in any form. The simplicity that St. Francis desired was a simplicity of intention no less than a simplicity of action, and both the one and the other of these requisites were lacking in the intellectual atmosphere of his time. In comparison with his directness the schools were mazes of complication, and learning therefore assumed in his eyes a character directly opposed to his desire. Simplicity had for him, as had all his special characteristics, one aim and one aim only, and that was God and the knowledge of God to the exclusion, if need be, of everything else. To be content with God alone was with St. Francis the acme of simplicity, for it was founded on a willingness to pass by everything which did not make for the satisfaction of the one sacrosanct desire. The desire for learning, in other words, gave place to the desire for Wisdom in its highest sense, and this he saw to be linked with simplicity, as

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 83.

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poverty was linked with humility and charity with obedience. He acclaims Wisdom as queen and simplicity as her sister, and these are among the virtues that no man can possess unless he first die to the selfhood that obscures him. Wisdom confounds evil, and simplicity confounds all those copies of the one true Queen, which masquerade as the wisdom of the world and of the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the cult of simplicity is open to many abuses, and St. Francis saw more than one exaggeration of it during his life. It is easily made a cloak for stupidity, for laziness, for lack of initiative—yet he would gladly pardon even rank stupidity if it were backed by genuine fervour and devotion—and it does not seem that he was often deceived. A peculiar power of penetration and a quick grasp of character saved him from many pitfalls. The immortal exploits of Brother Juniper, whose mental limitations were equalled by his spiritual sincerity, cannot have failed to cause him an acute delight, and in comparison with the intellectual tendencies of some of the brethren he preferred a simplicity which bordered on inanity.<sup>2</sup> A peasant who had found St. Francis sweeping out a church had joined himself to the brotherhood, and considered himself bound to imitate St. Francis in everything he did. He copied him in the minutest details of everyday life, rising and sitting, praying and sighing, and even spitting as he did, and the *Mirror of Perfection* relates that St. Francis rejoiced at so great purity and simplicity.<sup>3</sup> It is easy to jeer, and perhaps easier still to err in the opposite extreme.

But by the side of all his realization of the danger to which intellectualism was subject, St. Francis had the conviction that its efficacy in matters of the spirit was over-

<sup>1</sup> Salutation of the Virtues (*Writings*, p. 20). Cf. Celano, ii, 120.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Life of Brother Juniper* at the end of the *Fioretti*.

<sup>3</sup> *Mirror*, lvii.

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rated. He took up the typically mystical attitude that the knowledge of God could not be gained by way of the intellect, and that the power of that faculty to effect real and lasting spiritual betterment was strictly limited. It bore, therefore, in his eyes a character of insufficiency, and he never tired of pointing out to those dissidents from strict poverty who were anxious to acquire learning that all their skill in dialectic was not of so much avail as the spiritual enthusiasm of the unlettered brethren.

It may well be that ultimately all conversion and all spiritual influence are a result of a strong and active current of love directed on the person by whom conversion is experienced, and although love may not necessarily be rendered impossible by intellectual activity, it is not, at any rate, an essential or natural part of it. It is impossible to love with the intellect—possible, perhaps only to appraise with it—and the vital change of life which is called conversion is therefore outside the sphere of its influence. On this St. Francis insisted with unremitting force. He pointed out that the brethren were in danger of believing that they were filled with devotion and illuminated with the knowledge of God because of their understanding of the scriptures, while, as a matter of fact, they would remain cold and empty within, and be unable to return to their pristine energy of prayer because of the time they had given to intellectual pursuits. He insisted on the danger of appropriation by such brethren of the results of their preaching; the belief, that is, that the credit was due to their own skill instead of to the grace of God; and explained to them in words that they could not mistake that the people whom they believed to have been converted by their own knowledge had, as a matter of fact, been moved by the prayers of the simpler brethren who knew nothing of what they had done.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, lxxii.

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But just as they were ineffective in influencing others by means of their learning, so were they unable to promote their own spiritual advancement by those means. "My brethren who are led by desire of learning," he was by way of saying, "shall find their hands empty in the day of tribulation. I would therefore, that they be rather strengthened in virtues, that when the time of tribulation shall come they shall have the Lord with them in their straits. For a time of tribulation is to come, when books shall be useful for nothing, and shall be thrown in windows and cupboards."<sup>1</sup> The time of tribulation which St. Francis foresaw was the split among the brethren, into those who were anxious to keep the Rule in all its severity and simplicity, and those who desired to alter it in a way which meant a departure from the characteristically Franciscan principles. But in his mind there may well have been also the conviction that in any tribulation the knowledge of the intellect is of no kind of use whatever for comfort or support, and that the only efficacious help comes from a deeper and more intimate source. Sorrow, trouble, "the day of tribulation"—these are not disorders of the reason, but affections, as it were, of the heart, and the reason is therefore unable to bring peace and strength. The source from which such help can come is the deeper knowledge of that which is alone real and true and everlasting, and one of the graces of tribulation is the forcing of this into realization. At no other time is the sterility of uninspired learning so pitifully in evidence, for the heart must be cured by that which dwells in the heart and cannot be comprehended by the mind.

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, lxix; Celano, ii, 195. Cf. *Mirror*, lxxii: "But they who have taken no thought except to know and to show to others the way of salvation, doing nothing for themselves" (those, that is, who had an exterior knowledge rather than an experience of religion) "shall stand naked and empty before the tribunal of Christ."



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For the whole essence of St. Francis rests on his conviction that the true nourishment of the soul is God, and he could see no sufficient reason for giving time and attention to the development of a faculty fundamentally incapable of knowing Him. It was in the stillness and the silence of that faculty that he communed with the divine: "drawing outward things inward," as Celano says, "he would uplift his spirit on high. And so the whole man, not so much praying as having become a living prayer, concentrated his whole attention and affection on the one thing which he was seeking from the Lord."<sup>1</sup> In such a concentration there is no place for the play of the reason; it is in the exclusion of the workings of the mind that such concentration indeed consists, and on that which takes their place that all its good depends. As has been said a thousand times, God is known in the stillness of the mind, and without it no communion is possible. "If the body eats its food in quiet," St. Francis would therefore say, "which food together with itself will become meat for worms, with what great peace and tranquillity ought the soul to take its food, which is its God?"<sup>2</sup>

In his determination absolutely to renounce propriety of any sort St. Francis was intent on avoiding also that phase of it—as an abstract amassment by the mind—which he saw in learning, and he is reported as having expressed precisely this view of it in his general insistence on poverty. "He that would attain this height must needs in all ways renounce, not only the wisdom of the world, but even knowledge of letters, so that, dispossessed of such an inheritance, he may go in the strength of the Lord, and give himself up naked into the arms of the Crucified. For in vain doth he utterly renounce the world who keepeth

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 96; *Mirror*, xciv; Bonaventure, x, 6.

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in the secret places of his heart a shrine for his own senses.”<sup>1</sup> That such a witness to the hindrances of learning should be borne by so celebrated a scholastic as St. Bonaventure is ample evidence of the importance that must have been attached to it by St. Francis himself, and evidence also of the impression that such an insistence must have made upon the writer. A desire for such a complete nakedness of every semblance of possession was not a natural part of the temperament of a philosopher and a theologian, and it speaks volumes for the power of persuasion that St. Francis carried with him that he was able to convince such a man of its necessity. It is one with all his teaching on poverty, and as the essence of that was non-attachment to, and not any scorn for, that which was subject to possession, so in this case the emphasis is laid on the need for detachment, and not on any evil which might be supposed to reside in the actual fact of knowledge. As he wrote to St. Anthony in the letter quoted above, he had no objection to teaching that did not overlay the more vital things, but he had grave doubts of the ability of those things to survive in the face of increasing intellectual acquirements. “There are so many who willingly rise unto knowledge, that he shall be blessed who makes himself barren for the love of God,” he said to the novice who pestered him for permission to own a psalter,<sup>2</sup> and he would expound the paradox of the Book of Samuel, that the barren woman has borne many children, as being applicable to the unlearned brother who nevertheless brought forth good fruit.<sup>3</sup>

There are, finally, traces in St. Francis of that intuitive faculty which it is suggested both by mysticism and modern philosophy should take the place of intellectual working. His sympathetic understanding of all the voices of Nature is reserved for consideration in a later chapter,

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, vii, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, iv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxii.

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but there is a striking incident in his life which suggests with exceptional vividness the difference between the two methods. One time when he was at Siena a member of the Order of Preachers visited him and talked for some time of the life of the spirit. The visitor was a doctor of divinity, and when he asked St. Francis his opinion on a text from Ezekiel which he could not understand, St. Francis naturally demurred to instructing a man who was evidently more learned than himself. But the other insisted, and put his question again. What, he asked, was St. Francis' understanding of the saying, "If thou proclaim not to the wicked man his wickedness, I will require his soul at thy hand," because he himself knew many people who were in mortal sin whom he had not denounced. The answer which St. Francis gave shows the naturalness with which he applied the saying in a way which made it referable to all the details of life. If the passage were to be taken as of general application, he said, he took it to mean that what was demanded was that a man should live in such a way as to reprove the wicked, as it were, automatically, by the example of his life and the purity of his conversation. Avoiding the obvious interpretation that it was incumbent on every man to go about proclaiming the wickedness of his neighbours, he turned the tables on those who might be inclined to do so, and insisted that what was fundamentally necessary was a shining example in their own lives. The answer is said to have given immense edification to the visitor, and caused him to remark as he went away that "this man's theology, based on purity and contemplation, is a soaring eagle, while our learning crawls with its belly on the ground."<sup>1</sup>

The comparison is not unjust: the higher faculty which, awakened by long periods of contemplation, enters into

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 103 ; cf. Bonaventure, ix, 2.

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a region where the intellect cannot come, gains a source of comprehension from which the logical faculty is debarred by its very nature. St. Francis' theology was not an intellectual acquisition, but was of the nature of this inner intuitive sight which knows instead of propounding theories: it pierces through the external into the very core of the mystery. As Celano puts it, "the lover's affection entered within, whereas the knowledge of masters remains without."<sup>1</sup>

The accumulation of sciences is a barren pursuit in comparison with the attainment of a knowledge of that reality which underlies them all, and there can be little doubt that St. Francis touched that reality by the force of his love and his great desire. "I do not question thee as being a lettered man," a certain cardinal said to him once at Rome, after he had, in Celano's words, "brought deep things to light," "but as one who has the Spirit of God; and I gladly accept thy interpretation, because I know that it proceeds from God alone."<sup>2</sup> And it was this conviction that his super-rational knowledge came from God and Him alone that gave to St. Francis his certainty and his strength.

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 102.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 104.



## Chapter Nine

**A**S THE PRINCIPLE OF OBEDIENCE IS concerned with the will, and that of poverty with the avoidance of either actual or mental appropriation, so the principle of chastity is intended to make for the freedom of man from the tyranny of the body and the emotions which seem specifically to relate to it. On one side the monastic vows stand for three aspects of freedom; on the other, and as a corollary, they demand the subjection of those things from which freedom is sought. For subjection represents the obverse of freedom, and from both points of view the vows represent a revaluation in the interests of the spirit. The subjection attitude is visible in the question of obedience, more visible in that of poverty, and most evident of all in the consideration of chastity, and freedom (as its obverse) is, it may be, increasingly obscured. But in effect both freedom and subjection are permanent partners in all three questions, and the only variation is in the degree in which they are in evidence.

It seems clear that the emotions were confused, if not identified, with the body by the mystics in general, for the broad reason, perhaps, that the more urgent desires were felt to relate especially to the body, and the body offered a direct and evident subject with which it was possible to deal. This confusion and even identification have, therefore, to be borne in mind, as implied in what follows.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice that mediaeval psychology placed the emotions under the general heading of physical, as opposed to rational. Scaramelli classes all the emotions under "*il corpo vile*" in this way



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It seems equally clear that the body did not stand, in the minds of many of the mystics, for itself and the emotions alone. By a strange process of symbolization it came to represent, for them and to a particular degree, the lower self against which they waged their unremitting war. And in attempting to understand the reasons for such a representation it is not difficult to see some of the body's characteristics which must have struck them.

In considering it, as compared with the spirit as conceived by them, they could hardly fail to have been influenced, in the first place, by the fact that whereas spirit was by the hypothesis indivisible, matter was eminently susceptible of division. Division in any aspect being anathema to them, they were inclined to anathematize the body as being composed of that which lent itself thereto. From this to its becoming a symbol of division was a short step. Its natural demands, its normal needs, could not but appear as tending towards separateness: the body claimed a thing for itself as apart from other selves, and insisted on the very fact of apartness as the foundation of its claim. Its continued existence depended on the regularity with which these claims were satisfied, its well-being varied to a great extent with the attention given to its demands, and it battered on separateness as the spirit was nourished by universality.

Further, from a certain point of view the body stood for that which seemed to divide off the essential part of one man from another: it became the sign of delimitation, of that which barred the way to intimate contact between what is ultimately vital in men by the fact of surrounding

(*Il Direttorio Mistico*, tratt. i, cap. iii, sec. 31). See also *Psychology*, by Michael Maher, S.J. (1905), where the mediaeval system is fully discussed and it is pointed out that the schoolmen treated the emotions along with the passions, and these latter were "*passiones sensibiles vel animales*" (p. 426).

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it as with a veil. That such a veiling is a correlative of manifestation, that it is the fate to which manifestation must submit as the basis, it may be, of union on a higher plane, was a conception which received no emphasis at the hands of those who took this attitude. Their instinctive dislike of division in any form led them to insist rather on the fact of the body standing for such division, and to treat it accordingly.

Besides the fact of it symbolizing what was so ardently disliked, which may be regarded as its positive disability, the body laboured under a negative disability of no less gravity. It might easily be felt by those who treated it with the least respect of all that the body was inadequate to give them the one thing they desired. Inasmuch as their whole purpose was knowledge of and communion with God, it is not difficult to conceive them as regarding the body as incapable of providing this. May there not underlie their scorn of it the feeling that all that is highest, all that is final—all, in a word, that is real—cannot enter into the consciousness of man by the way of the senses? The senses are the body's channels of communication, and if God cannot be seen or heard or felt—if He cannot be cognized by any of the means with which the body is provided for cognizing the surrounding world—it is inevitable that a conviction of the body's inadequacy should result. However high the dignity of the physical senses, and however intricate and beautiful their working in connection with the world of sense, they must, if they do not bring to the mystics the communion which they seek, be held by them to fail signally.

It is on this feeling of the body's inferiority that rests the need of control. Though in their own sphere its activities are equally sacred with those of the spirit in the spirit's sphere, those spheres are not yet one. It does not follow from the fact of its dependence on the same omnipresent

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power as the highest of man's aspects that it is of equal value in the final analysis, or that all reason for repressing one to the exaltation of the other is done away; for the place of an inferior, if the inferiority be well and surely established must—beyond all casuistry—be one of subjection.

Standing thus at the head of a certain set of tendencies, sealed with the mark of their direction, the body came to be the symbol of that lower self in which those tendencies are centred. And as such it not only suffered from the severities necessary for its own subjection, but received the blows and underwent the privations that were aimed at that self. It was the obvious scapegoat for all the sins of a more subtle enemy that could not be seen.

The necessity for the control of the lower in the interests of the higher is the foundation on which the doctrine of asceticism is built. The ascetic is not a being without desire, but one who sacrifices the many desires of the body to the one desire of the spirit. Asceticism, like its foster-mother religion, is a means to an end, and it is only when this is forgotten that they both become barren. To regard the subjection of the body as an end in itself is to mistake the half-way house for the final goal, and to lose sight of the object of all journeying in so doing.

The main criticism which could be levelled at such a position is that it is an insistence on the fact of present or apparent difference rather than on that of future or real identity. If, it may be urged, the mystic has an ardent dislike of division in any form, why does he in his occasional tendency towards asceticism emphasize the division between the body and the spirit instead of their unity? Would he not be more consistent in substituting some transmutation of the lower part for its annihilation, some utilization of the body to the ends of the spirit for its subjection? Is there no way in which it could produce

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impulse and motive power towards and in the higher part, so that the spirit could be nourished by the transmuted desires and activities of the body? Would it not be possible, in fact, to exalt instead of debase?

Now, between this view and that of asceticism there are certain things in common. With both the aim is to prevent the lower part and the indrawing desires which are attributed to it from becoming a source of action; with both the aim is to avoid an identification of the soul with the lower part instead of the higher. Both of them conceive the lower part as having certain desires attaching to it, which have been borrowed, so to speak, from the one fount of desire which is neither of the higher nor the lower, but capable of direction towards either. It is thus desire in its misdirection which concerns them both, and its redirection which is their common aim. Fundamentally neither view is concerned with action so much as with the desire that prompts the action; the point for them both is not the thing that is done, but the reason for its doing. A little consideration will show that the external austerities of asceticism are not simply due to a lust for suffering, but to an exaggeration of one side of a conception which is common to all mysticism. Suffering for its own sake is a distortion of asceticism due to the fervour of the desire to let survive no part of what is considered a hindrance. Like most great and profoundly vital conceptions it has suffered bitterly at the hands of its most enthusiastic advocates, and has reached extremes of disproportion in which it bears no resemblance to the fundamental idea. To the true ascetic the harm of bodily gratification does not lie in the fact that such gratification actually takes place, but in the fact that he has acceded to the desire of the lower part which prompted such gratification and is, by his hypothesis, undesirable. There appears, in fact, nothing inconsistent in the sight of an ascetic joining in any kind of



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physical enjoyment, if it be remembered that his point is that he must approach the enjoyment without the physical desire having had any power over him. The use of the body for other and presumably higher purposes than its own must always remain open even to the most convinced ascetic.

This is, however, identical in its substance with that which is required by the view which may be called that of transmutation. It demands that the impulse of the lower part should be used for the production of impulse and motive power towards and in the higher, spiritual part, and this is in effect only another way of saying that the desire of the lower part shall be cut off and crushed out utterly inasmuch as it is lower—inasmuch, that is, as it tends to the gratification of the lower part only. The sensible satisfactions of the body shall be used for the glorification of the highest, and on this the advocates of both the views find themselves in agreement. But there is a vital difference in the way in which they propose to arrive at this common end. For the ascetic a necessary step on the way towards the final abolition of the desire of the lower part is to forbid that part any actual gratification in action—his method is to stamp out such desire by allowing it none but the absolutely necessary activity. He is so convinced of the profound undesirability of the impulses of the body as he knows it that he will give it no opportunity of gaining ascendance over him. But in the true sense such asceticism is only a temporary measure; the ascetic life and the mystic life are neither partners nor antagonists, but in the relation of night to day. The one is a preparation for the other, and when the abolition of the desire of the lower part as a source of action has been accomplished the period of asceticism is over, and that part and its energy may be fully utilized for the purposes of the spirit. Their spheres are then, in some sense, one, for they are no longer



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antagonists, but master and servant. There is no liberty during war, but when the war is over and the respective positions of the combatants are decided, then even the vanquished knows a greater freedom than he knew in the throes of battle.

And who shall say that a life during which this repression has been chiefly in evidence, a life which has not, as its critics will say, reached its proper fulfilment in respect of numberless activities which, at the hands of others, are capable of great sanctification—who shall say that such a life has failed of its purpose? May not its activity continue, may not that soul which has gained due ascendance over its body at the end of a tumultuous life and at the cost of unspeakable efforts carry with it the fruits of just that victory into the state into which it passes, wherever and whenever that may be? It is conceivable, indeed, that if in the high wisdom of God it should return to a further existence on the world as we know it, it would appear as one of those to whom asceticism and the belief in the need for repression of any kind is entirely foreign. If for it that work were done so that it had learned the lesson of utilizing the body instead of being used by it, there would seem no reason why it should not turn to the sanctified fulfilment of the body's functions with the utmost naturalness.

But for those for whom the lesson is still to learn, such counsels can only be followed at the cost of a prolonged delay. Sooner or later—can it be doubted?—there must come the spell of repression which precedes the time of fulfilment, and to those who are sincere in their search the knowledge of the way for them is not over-far to seek. In spite of indifference and sloth, in spite also of the plausibility and the casuistry of reason with which the self-hood will resist it, in his own heart it is known to each and deserted only to his loss. For the rule of abstinence must precede the rule of the transmutation of all things into means

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of glorifying God, just as mystical crucifixion and death must precede mystical resurrection. It is only possible to be attached to things in God when a certain degree of detachment from them in the flesh has been attained, and the rule of transmutation is therefore not a rule for beginners, but for proficients in the spiritual life. The watchword of the anti-ascetic view is "Love God and do what you like," and this is in effect the liberty of the children of God, but the result of following its implications before the ever-present love for God is assured is evident enough. If all the impulses be indrawn towards the lower self, and that lower self be the centre of its own cosmos in place of the higher, the love for God will, *ipso facto*, be non-existent, and the doing of that which that self likes best will be chaos unrestrained. If there be indeed in the world souls at different stages of evolution, there must inevitably be one rule for the strong and another for the weak, and asceticism will find its place in the twentieth century as surely as it found it in the Middle Ages. It will be condemned by the one who is strong as surely as it will be necessary for the other who is yet weak, and it will be resisted by many for whom it is still inevitable, but it will not become the anachronism that it is claimed to be to-day by many for whom it is the one sure way of safety.

In its full signification, then, chastity relates to the body in itself, to the emotions, and to the lower self against the different aspects of which all the monastic vows are directed. In its specific application as meaning complete abstinence from all sexual activity it rests on principles similar to those already considered. It does not assume that sex is inherently evil because it demands abstinence from all expression, any more than asceticism assumes that a pillow is inherently evil because it substitutes a stone; but just as the one fears that too much comfort will enmesh the soul, so the other feels that a man may well be enticed from his

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proper concern by the demands of sex. The fear is a fear of exaggeration, either of comfort or of sexual interest, and, perhaps with the feeling that extremes can best be met by extremes, abstinence is required in either case. As the vow of poverty was called forth in part by the fear that property engrossed an undue proportion of the attention, so the vow of chastity was called forth by the feeling that sex might well do likewise. The fear of over-attention to anything that was not evidently God seems to have lain at the bottom of chastity as applied to the emotions and the body generally, and not specifically in regard to sex; but if it be applicable to the bodily requirements as a whole, it is particularly so to those that are sexual. Their power of monopolizing the attention is unique, and for the ascetic it was in their power of obsessing the mind to the practical exclusion of everything else that their danger lay. It may well have seemed to him that a man became bound to that which he desired by the very force of that desire, and that being bound he desired it still more, so that he was caught in a vicious circle from which escape was only a very dim possibility.

But besides this monopolizing of the attention by an activity which was notoriously liable to abuse and marked in the enormous majority of cases by all the self-centred characteristics of the lower self, and besides the natural dislike of the mystic of any kind to be impelled by the body or to allow it to influence him as a source of action, there was the extreme difficulty of dedicating sexual activity in any effective way. As there is no force which is greater for dedication so there is none which ministers more subtly to the demands of the self-hood. It is, and surely obviously, only in its highest and rarest manifestations that it is other than self-seeking: whatever of giving there be is generally more of accident than of essence. The desire which draws to the self is the death of the soul's life, and the

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greater part of sexual desire is characterized by such indrawing in an especial manner. Effectively to dedicate it, therefore, in the sense of offering it to God as the ultimate cause and the final effect, is an undertaking that will task any man to the limit of his powers, and be entirely beyond the capacity of the spiritual beginner. Realizing this, the ascetic preferred, to the attempt to utilize a desire which was saturated with all that he was intent on combating, to repress all its activity so that he might be freed from its bondage.

But there is nothing in the doctrine of asceticism that gives it any claim to be regarded as final, nor anything which discountenances the idea that when the desires of, for example, the body and the lower self generally for sexual expression have been suppressed as sources of action, the force of the desire which normally manifests in that manner should be used to a superior end. Sex, when it is sanctified, which must mean when it is no longer aimed at the satisfaction of a selfish desire, is, it may reasonably be supposed, one of the sure ways to the end of every mystic's journey, as surely as sex when it is unsanctified is the direct path to the present and actual hell of self-hood. As ever, universal legislation is an absurdity, and to proclaim either suppression or satisfaction of sexual desire as a way to the kingdom of heaven for all men at all times is an error of enthusiasm—if it is nothing worse.



## Chapter Ten

**I**T HAS BEEN REMARKED THAT asceticism and mysticism are general instincts of humanity, and that monasticism owes its origin to them as giving, presumably, an opportunity for the practice of the one and devotion to the other.<sup>1</sup> But though in humanity at large monasticism may have been their natural result, it is not their only, or their inevitable, fruit. Asceticism and mysticism are two of the most outstanding characteristics of St. Francis, but he not only had no desire on his own part to found or join himself to a monastery, but successfully resisted the suggestions of those in authority at Rome that he should do so. Conscious, it may be, of the abuses and distortion to which the monastic life is liable, he had it clearly in mind from the moment when his ministry may be said to have begun, that whatever its possibilities for good it was not the method that was marked out for himself and his companions. He saw an alternative way, the way of active service in the world, the way of contact with, rather than seclusion from, his fellow creatures, the way of living literally in the world but not being of it, and to the successful accomplishment of this he turned his life and his genius.

But he did not on that account desert the principles which normally result in monasticism. That for which mysticism stands—the actual and direct knowledge of God—was the motive force of his whole life, and asceticism was the immediate way which he saw would lead to it.

<sup>1</sup> See *Enc. Brit.*, article "Monasticism," by the Rev. E. C. Butler, O.S.B.





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And so firm was his conviction for the need of it as a preparation for the larger existence to come, that he required it of his followers as strictly as he demanded it of himself. That he exaggerated it, that he carried it in his own case to extremes which he ultimately regretted, is evidence of nothing more than the fervour of his enthusiasm and the fact that he was not born full-grown in the wisdom of the Spirit. His story is the story of a whole-hearted and heroic advance through one, and perhaps more than one, of the stages that lie between humanity and divinity; and while it is needful to recognize, it is ungracious to cavil at, the errors of him who was in one sense a pioneer. And though he did not himself entirely escape the besetting danger of asceticism, which is exaggeration, he delivered it both for himself and for his followers from a danger which was no less imminent. It is liable to a kind of formalism which takes no account of the end to which it should properly be directed, but demands the application of the rule of abstinence as a thing desirable in itself. From this St. Francis saved it by a conscious direction of it as a means towards an end which he very definitely had in view. He gave it for his own time a *raison d'être*, he used it with a purpose, and that reason and that purpose were spiritual freedom.

And spiritual freedom is dependent on peace, though such peace must needs be preceded by war. While the different aspects of man battle together for the ascendance there can be no question of conscious liberty: the spirit is obscured while its subjects revolt against its authority. The peace which succeeds to such a struggle is the peace in which the inferior aspect recognizes its inferiority, and without resenting its subjection pays obedience to its superior. In place of the continual claim of the body to rule there is the undisputed regency of the spirit, and those in whom this peace is established are centres of peace

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to all around them. They are, as St. Francis said, truly peace-makers,<sup>1</sup> and it is by love of, and submission to, all that is highest in them that such peace is gained. And it is the realization of the necessity of gaining this peace at the price of a period of active repression that lies at the base of the doctrine of asceticism.

St. Francis held this idea clearly before him from the beginning. Thus in his injunction to the earliest brethren on the eve of their departure for the first attempt to preach to the people, he placed before them the essence of the monastic vows as his last counsel. By virtue of their poverty they were to despise the world, their obedience was to mean to them the renunciation of their own personal will, and in chastity was the subjection of their bodies. And it may well be that with such recommendations, summed up and sealed by his parting admonition to them to cast their thoughts on the Lord in the assurance that they would thereby receive the spiritual nourishment they required, St. Francis felt that they would be secured as far as possible against all the difficulties they might have to face.<sup>2</sup>

The need for physical control came to him among the earliest of the definite views which afterwards shaped his life. Before the crucial moment at San Damiano which turned his energies in the direction of restoration, and so before the enthusiastic journey to Foligno to procure money with which to repair the church, the idea formed itself in its essentials, if not in all its details, within his mind. It came to him while he was praying, as a divine admonition, and took the form of a command to despise the things he had loved after the flesh. This was the condition of the fulfilment of the divine will, and the beginning of a revaluation by means of which the ordinary values should

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 14, Admonition 15.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, i, 29.

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be reversed. It did not only require abstinence from the things which the body demanded, but the doing of what was naturally repugnant to it, so that in no way might it be in the ascendant, either as impelling towards its own ends or as hindering the activities of the spirit.

With this, for him, new and vital conception in his mind St. Francis went out from the place of his prayer, and found an opportunity for putting it into immediate practice. On his way to Assisi he met a leper, from whom his natural repugnance to the disease caused him to turn away instinctively. But remembering the new-found principle of doing violence to himself, he made the tremendous effort not only of resisting his inclination to run away, but of getting down from his horse, giving the leper some money, and finally kissing his wounded and disfigured hands. The horror with which such an action must have filled his naturally fastidious nature can only have been equalled by the inundation of joy and strength that swept over him when it had been accomplished. It was his first act of violent self-control, his first proclamation of his real superiority over the natural inclinations of his body, and it was rewarded with the full force of the inevitable reaction. As such it marks a definite stage in his inner life—the commencement of a path which he travelled unswervingly till the end—and so great was the impression that it made upon him that when, many years afterwards, he wrote his will, he mentioned it as the beginning of his life of revaluation.<sup>1</sup> It was followed by a period when he visited even the hospital where the lepers were gathered in all their hideousness, till a time came when he could see and serve them even in the horrors of their disease without the feeling of physical repulsion.<sup>2</sup>

But besides forcing himself to do things which physically

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Legend*, II; Celano, i, 17; ii, 9. Bonaventure, i, 5.



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and in every way repelled him, St. Francis found the necessity of denying their full liberty to his bodily demands. Besides forcing himself to eat the unsavoury messes which he collected from door to door, he refused ever wholly to satisfy his appetite or quench his thirst, and the details of his abstinence fill pages of his histories. He was in the habit of insisting upon the difficulty of satisfying the physical demands without yielding to the promptings of the senses,<sup>1</sup> and to be impelled, beyond the measure of the strictest necessity, by any needs of the body was repugnant to him. Even when he was invited to eat with the great princes, of the world and of the Church, with whom his mission brought him into contact, he would satisfy the need for control by eating only a little of what was set before him, and making a pretence of eating the rest. And on the rare occasions when he came by appetizing food he would mix ashes with it, so that he should not be in danger of constraint by his body while satisfying its absolute needs. He had, in fact, only one desire, and that was for spiritual freedom and its high consequences. Similarly he would allow himself only the scantiest covering, whether asleep or awake, and insisted on sleeping on the bare ground whenever possible. And with this, his desire for absolute rectitude, for freedom from any hint of hypocrisy, compelled him to proclaim to all the world any deviation from the most rigorous severity. A chicken eaten when he was ill, a piece of fur sewn inside his robe to protect those parts of his body where he suffered most acutely, seemed to him equally to demand avowal; and in the first case therefore he made a brother drag him naked round Assisi while he admitted what he had done, while in the second he insisted on a piece of fur being also sewn on the outside of his robe.<sup>2</sup> It is sufficiently probable that he himself arrived, some

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, v, 1; Celano, i, 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Legend*, 22; Celano, i, 51, 52; *Mirror*, lxi, lxii; Bonaventure, vi, 2.

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considerable time before the end of his life, at a condition in which his body was so completely under his control that further self-denying exercises were unnecessary, and that he might therefore well have ceased them; but again it must be remembered that it was by his life and his actions that he preached, and that he was on that account compelled to some extent to continue as an example to others in a course which was no longer necessary for himself. The incident of his confession of having eaten chicken, mentioned above, appears to have occurred some five years before his death, and a similar occurrence took place four years later.<sup>1</sup> Again, when he was at Rome on a visit to Cardinal Hugolin, which took place about three years before his death, he insisted on begging scraps from door to door instead of eating what had been provided, and when the Cardinal remonstrated with him he explained that it was incumbent on him to be an example to his brethren. His purpose was to teach by his deeds those who were, or would be, in his Order, for it was as an example that he had been given to them.<sup>2</sup>

But despite his desire for the utmost simplicity in food as in all other things, or rather in part just because of that desire, he was unwilling to frame detailed rules as to what the brethren might or might not eat. His final aim was for them to be free from all bondage, and he gave countenance therefore to strict legislation only in so far as it was necessary to restrain what would otherwise become a stricter tie. There is some apparent inconsistency between his unwillingness to eat or allow his brethren to eat particularly palatable food, and his attitude as expressed in an episode which occurred on the eve of his return from the Holy

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, lxii; Celano, ii, 131. This was a confession of having eaten cakes cooked with lard during the Advent fast. Cf. Joergensen, *St. François*, book iv, chap. ii, pp. 407 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, xxiii, lxvii. Cf. Celano, ii, 73, 120, 173.

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Land. On this occasion meat was placed before him and his companions, and the question arose as to whether they should eat it or not. St. Francis' conclusion was that they should obey the precept in the Gospel and eat what was set before them, regardless of any other rules and regulations. There is little doubt that in the first place this decision was in the nature of a protest against the excessive details of the rules which had been enacted by St. Francis' Vicars during his absence and had just come to his knowledge. Not only had they been acting contrary to his wishes in applying to Rome for privileges, but had increased the number and severity of the fasts which were incumbent on the brethren. Their whole attitude had been one of revolt against the simplicity of the Franciscan ideal, and their new regulations as to fasting were typical of the formalism of their general standpoint. In place of the wise freedom that St. Francis had ordained—a freedom limited only by a consideration of what was necessary for preserving the yet higher liberty of the spirit against the bondage of the body—they had begun to put the meticulous regulations for the smallest details of life against which his whole nature revolted.<sup>1</sup> But besides being a reaction against this tendency, it is possible that St. Francis' decision was founded on a new and clearer realization of the folly of regarding anything as finally unclean. Abstinence was to him a discipline aimed at a perfectly definite result, but the Vicars had begun to mistake the means for the end, and were therefore well on the way to losing sight of the end altogether. It may well be that at this time, some five or six years before his death, St. Francis recognized with a new vividness the essential sanctity of all things, and the right which he had gained by his battles and his abstinence to make full use of them all in the work of his life. In his

<sup>1</sup> See Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. vii, p. 309 ; Cuthbert, *Life*, pp. 240-1.

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own case he may well have realized and entered into the liberty of the children of God, and given evidence of such an entry by accepting what was set before him without demur. With the knowledge that he was no longer impelled by his bodily desires all paths would be open to him and all things holy, for the one reason that he had overcome their attraction.<sup>1</sup>

But at no period of his life did the intensity of his desire for self-conquest in general and the control of the body in particular lead him into some of the extremes from which asceticism has often suffered. He was quite clearly of the opinion that the ordinary events of everyday life offered ample opportunities for the exercise of physical control. In the simplicity and even intentional unsavouriness of his food; in his preference for sleeping on the bare ground or the uncovered rock rather than on a bed; in the unwillingness which he continually evinced to wear many clothes as a protection against the biting winds of Umbria, he found the normal means of physical subjection, and he only permitted more violent methods when some particular insurrection had to be quelled. At one of the early Chapters, in fact, he definitely put a stop to the use of the traditional implements of asceticism. The first brethren, in their enthusiasm to embrace every opportunity for control, erred on the side of violence, and loaded themselves with coats of mail worn next to their skin, belts and hoops of iron which cut into their flesh and broke down their health, beside

<sup>1</sup> This desire of St. Francis to avoid too detailed regulations and to make it quite clear that he would not permit his Vicars to enact them either, resulted in an addition to the Primitive Rule to the effect that the brethren should eat of all food that men can eat, when necessity should arise (First Rule, chap. ix, *Writings*, p. 44). See also First Rule, chap. iii (*ibid.*, p. 36), where the brethren are allowed to eat of all foods that are placed before them, according to the Gospel. This freedom reappeared in the Second Rule, chap. iii (*Writings*, p. 67). Cf. *Little Flowers*, chap. iv, where the same point is made.



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subjecting themselves to the perpetual irritation of hair-shirts. But of this St. Francis would have none. He made them collect all these evidences of a fantastic misconception of his own idea of asceticism, and deposit them in a great heap on the ground, forbidding the brethren from that time onward to wear anything next their skin but the ordinary tunic.<sup>1</sup> The rigour and severity of coats of mail and hoops of iron savoured, it may be, too much of lifeless formalism, and werè in danger of reducing the brethren to a state in which the desirable interior attitude would be impossible.

On these two points, in fact, St. Francis insisted in a further incident. In the early days of the Order, when the brethren were living in the hut at Rivo Torto on their return from Rome, they were awakened in the middle of the night by the lamentations and groans of one of their number who cried out that he was dying of hunger. Without hesitation St. Francis gave him food, and with his fine tact took some himself and caused all the others to do the same, so that the brother should not feel ashamed of his need. He took advantage of the opportunity to explain to them generally that there could be no set rule of asceticism, and that the details must vary according to the capacities of each individual. To imitate the austerities of another was to run a considerable danger, because they were ever to bear in mind that each body must have what it required to enable it to serve the spirit. Just as superfluity prevented this, so did inordinate abstinence, and he impressed on them the need for common sense and a reasonable moderation in bodily denial by saying that though he had eaten with them this once he would not do so again. But it is recorded that on another occasion at Rivo Torto, whether before or after that already mentioned

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, xxvii ; *Little Flowers*, xviii. Cf. Celano, ii, 21-2.



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does not appear, St. Francis took with him privately an old brother who had fallen ill, and ate grapes with him, so that he should not be ashamed of eating alone.<sup>1</sup>

Mortification, then, was in itself, for St. Francis, no evidence of sanctity. Even its extremes, which—for the rest—rob asceticism of its value and reduce it to an ugly and distorted formula for life, he considered possible for sinners. The safeguard was that mortification of all kinds should be accompanied by interior recollection of its purpose, which was the subjection of the body to the spirit. It was this interior recollection—this faithfulness to God—of which the sinner was incapable, and distinguished the devout ascetic from the formalist merely. It is the vitalization of asceticism, and the one excuse for its existence.<sup>2</sup>

For the rest, St. Francis was compelled to realize at the end of his life that in his own case he had been too severe in the demands he had made on his body. A conversation which he had with one of the brethren after he had received the Stigmata is reported by Celano, and brings out his attitude at that time so well that it may be quoted in full. On account of his many infirmities it became necessary to try and ease him with such remedies as were available, and he therefore asked the advice of one of his sons. “ ‘What thinkest thou, dearest son,’ he asked, ‘of the frequent murmuring of my conscience touching the care of my body? It fears lest I be over-indulgent to the body in its sickness and lest I be eager to relieve it with delicacies carefully sought out. Not that it can take anything with pleasure now that it is worn by long infirmity and that all incitement of taste has gone.’ The son (recognizing that the words of his answer were being given him by the Lord)

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, xxvii, xxviii; Celano, ii, 22, 176; Bonaventure, v, 7. The same teaching as to not overtaxing the body is contained in the *Mirror*, xcvi, and Celano, ii, 129.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 134.

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made heedful reply to the father saying: 'Tell me, father, if thou deignest to do so, with what diligence thy body, while it could, obeyed thy behests?' 'I bear it witness, my son,' answered St. Francis, 'that it has been obedient in all things and has spared itself in nothing, but has (as it were) rushed headlong to obey all commands. It has shirked no toil, has refused no discomfort, if only it might do as it was bid. Herein have I and it been in perfect agreement, that we should serve Christ the Lord without any reluctance.' And the brother said: 'Where, then, father, is thy liberality? where thy compassion and thine eminent discretion? Is it a worthy rewarding of faithful friends to accept a kindness gladly, and then in the time of his need not to requite the giver's merit? How couldst thou have served Christ thy Lord all this time without the help of the body? Has it not, as thou thyself allowest, exposed itself to every danger, for the sake of this very thing?' 'I confess, my son,' said the father, 'that this is most true.' Then said the son: 'Is it reasonable that thou shouldest be wanting in such great need to so faithful a friend who has for thy sake exposed himself and what is his even unto death? Be it far from thee, father, stay and staff of the afflicted: be this sin against the Lord far from thee.' 'Blessed be thou, also, my son,' he answered, 'who hast wisely ministered such salutary remedies to my scruples.' And he began joyfully to address his body thus: 'Rejoice, brother body, and forgive me, for behold now I gladly fulfil thy desires, and gladly hasten to attend to thy complaints.'"<sup>1</sup> This somewhat tardy gratitude to his body is sufficient evidence of a recognition—due perhaps in part to the enlightenment he had received at the time of the Stigmata—that he had overstepped the bounds of prudence in his desire to be a perfect

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 210, 211.

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example of self-control. Like most enthusiasts he had been able to see the need of discretion for his followers, but in his own case had been unable to obey its dictates.

But as a matter of fact he had been haunted before by the fear that he was being carried too far in his warfare. When he was in prayer at the hermitage of Sartiano the idea came to him that perhaps he was too unrelenting in his persecution, with the additional thought that extremes of penance might even amount to sin. At the moment he repelled the suggestion, characteristically regarding it as a temptation of the devil, and proceeded to discipline his body even more acutely than before.<sup>1</sup> But the fact that the idea occurred to him at all suggests that he had interior qualms about the complete rightness of his behaviour, as the fact of his paying no attention to it evidences the force of his will. But it was not until some five or six years later, when he had acquired a wider experience and a greater knowledge of the ways of the spirit, that he was enabled clearly to realize that even in his own case his whole-heartedness had carried him too far.

It is nevertheless a certain moderation of bodily ill-usage in the interests of the spirit that raises St. Francis' asceticism above the level of that of some of his fellow ascetics. He did not fall into the extreme of regarding the actual body as irretrievably bad, though he had no doubt as to the danger of its impulsions. In its place as servant he knew that it was holy, and, perhaps contrary to expectation, realized that as the dwelling-place of the spirit it had not only its excuse, but its use. This is the other side of his continual abuse of it, and the proof that such abuse had its source in clearness of sight rather than in a blind and traditional prejudice. In his instructions to the brethren for their journeys he required them always to behave with

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, v, 4; Celano, ii, 116.

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the same quietude and humility that they would maintain if they were in a hermitage or a cell, and reminded them that in their body they had a cell that was ever with them. The soul, he told them, was the hermit who could remain in the cell of their brother the body, and pray to God and meditate on Him therein. The ordering and submission of this living cell were, however, necessary to the soul's peace: it was that into which they must be able to retire in the certainty that they would not find it at war with its inhabitant, and unless this were attained, the habitation of a cell made with hands could profit them little or nothing.<sup>1</sup>

But at the bottom of St. Francis' abuse of that for which he loved to show a certain contempt by speaking of it as his Brother Ass, was the feeling that it stood for something wider and more far-reaching than the actual physical vehicle. It was unquestionably for him the symbol of all the desires and demands which emanated from the lower self. As such it suffered at his hands, as it has suffered at the hands of many others, from some of the violence and even ferocity that was directed against tendencies and inclinations which it was his immediate purpose to annihilate. It is far from improbable that he did not always keep clear in his mind the distinction between the actual body and that for which it stood, and that it was therefore substituted in more cases than one for the whole of what is termed in the language of theology the natural man. The fact of its so symbolizing the lower self accounts for the apparently disproportionate severity of some of his pronouncements and certain of his actions with regard to it, and renders intelligible statements which would otherwise be devoid of meaning. It is, for instance, impossible to conceive anyone of St. Francis' penetration and insight into the ways of the spirit making the statement that he who holds captive the body and guards himself from it is

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, lxv.

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secure from any other enemy, visible or invisible,<sup>1</sup> if the body be taken to refer to the physical vehicle only. It would be an obvious misstatement, and would leave out of account sins against which St. Francis was himself particularly vehement. Hatred, envy, resentment—tendencies of this kind cannot on any argument be held to attach especially to the body in the strict sense, and yet they are of a gravity at least equal to, if not greater than, that of any bodily misdeed. In the same Admonition St. Francis speaks of those who commit sin or suffer wrong blaming their enemy or their neighbour, and points out that this is an error, for the reason that each one has his enemy in his power—to wit, the body by which he sins. Now if the body by which he sins mean the actual body alone, the statement is obviously incorrect, since the wrongs that may be committed or suffered without the body being concerned are too evident to mention. But if the body in this sense mean the lower self, that statement is not only literally correct, but remarkably penetrating. A man can only be wronged by permitting himself to allow that the wrong affects him, and to allow this is to admit that he is in some degree separated from the source from which the wrong comes. The capacity to be hurt varies with the measure in which separation exists and is insisted upon, and it is only when the personal self is no longer regarded as standing over against all other selves that immunity is reached. On the assumption that the only sin is separateness and that which conduces to and flows from it, the body by which a man sins refers equally clearly to the lower self. It is therefore literally true that if a man hold captive the lower self with all its tendencies to division, no other enemy visible or invisible can do him harm or cause him to sin.

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 12, Admonition 10.



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The same conception of the body as symbolizing the whole of the inclinations of the lower self is brought out in others of the Admonitions as well as in the early biographies. Speaking of the way in which a man may know if he have the spirit of God—which is equivalent to saying that he is active in his higher self—St. Francis says that the test is that if the Lord work some good through him, his body—which is ever at variance with all that is good—is not therefore puffed up.<sup>1</sup> The very fact that he considered the body as being the antithesis of all that is good is in itself sufficient to point to his having regarded it as equivalent to the lower self; and the impossibility of imagining the actual body as being affected by any good deed removes it beyond doubt. It is precisely the separated self that congratulates itself on having itself brought about the good rather than some other person, regardless of the fact that by virtue of its separateness it is *ipso facto* incapable of good. But he who has realized his higher self—in whom the spirit of God is active—is by the very fact past the danger of appropriation, and knows that the source of all good is universal. To be puffed up, in St. Francis' words, by any good that may be done through him is therefore as impossible for him as it is inevitable for one who still regards himself as separated. Similarly in his explanation of the beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," St. Francis speaks of those who are troubled because of a single word which seems to be hurtful to their bodies or because of something being taken from them, as being by no means poor in spirit.<sup>2</sup> The idea of the actual body being hurt by a word carries no meaning with it, but the conception is strikingly applicable to the lower self. It is just that with its indrawing, self-centred tendencies that is hurt by a word more easily than by anything else; it is wounded in its most

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 13, Admonition 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14, Admonition 14.

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vulnerable part precisely because of the separateness on which it depends for existence. Its own rights are the charter of its false liberty, and to assail these rights by word or deed is to arouse the most acute resentment. It is also to the propriety—the desire for exclusive ownership—that is instinctive with the lower self that St. Francis is evidently referring when he couples the possibility of people being hurt by something being taken from them with their bodies being hurt by a word. It is the lower self which feels the attack upon its essence when it is deprived of something which it considered its own, as when it is hurt by some unkindness or severity of word.

And so also in the passage in which St. Francis is rebuking those who take praise to themselves, it is the flesh which stands for that which is so inclined. He speaks of it as man's greatest foe. "It knows not how to recollect anything so as to grieve over it, nor to foresee anything so as to fear it. Its study is, to use up the present. And, what is worse, it claims for itself, and transfers to its own glory what has been given not to it, but to the soul. It gathers from without praise for its virtues, applause for its watchings and prayers. It leaves the soul nothing, and seeks payment even for its tears."<sup>1</sup> This clearly refers to the appropriative instinct of the lower self, usurping the place of the higher.

It is a result of this tendency to confound the body and that for which it stood, that St. Francis on certain occasions caused it to share in the contumely he felt for the latter. Shortly before the reception of the Stigmata he went apart from the companions with whom he was travelling, and remained in a deserted church to pass the night in prayer. While so occupied he was assailed by fears and temptations—by hordes of devils, as he put it—whereat, making the

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 134.

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sign of the Cross, he invited them to do to his body whatever they might be allowed to do, inasmuch as, having no greater enemy than the body, they would thereby revenge him of his adversary instead of his having to do so himself.<sup>1</sup> In this case the body seems to have stood both for itself and the lower self; the symbol and the thing symbolized were regarded as one; and St. Francis laid himself open to the attacks in the knowledge that their only power was over that which he despised, and that his higher part, his spiritual self, was secure from all danger. His defence in this case was not dependent on his own power, but rested on the complete and inherent immunity of the divine spirit with which he felt himself already in some sense united. According to the measure in which he was made one therewith the result of any trial he might undergo could only be for good.

But while this security against the more subtle kind of assault was gained comparatively late in life, when his spiritual power may unhesitatingly be regarded as approaching its zenith, St. Francis accepted at all times unsought physical hardships as gratuitous aids in the war he had undertaken for the subjection of his body. He did not only receive them without resentment—with the rather negative calmness of resignation—but hailed them with genuine joy. Under his revaluation in the interests of the spirit the desirability of any incident increased in proportion to the measure in which it was physically difficult, and decreased in proportion to the bodily ease and comfort it afforded. Early in his new life, when he was filled with the exaltation of his experience before the Crucifix of San Damiano, he left the world for a while to wander on the slopes of Monte Subasio. There he was attacked by a band of robbers, to whose questions he would vouchsafe no

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 122; *Mirror*, lix; *Little Flowers*, The First Consideration of the Most Holy Stigmata.

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other answer than that he was the herald of the great king. Incensed by his assurance they incontinently threw him into a drift of snow and left him to extract himself as best he could. With his new-found conception of the worth of things such an experience was to St. Francis an occasion for unrestrained delight. Exhilarated by great joy, as his biographer says, he got out of the snowdrift, and was so genuinely grateful for an opportunity of controlling his body by the force that was in him, that he made the trees ring with the praises of God.<sup>1</sup>

This glad acceptance of unsought suffering, physical or mental—which is the side of asceticism that is, so to speak, automatic—remained with St. Francis during all his life. He preached it to Brother Leo in his description of their imaginary ill usage at the hands of the doorkeeper of Santa Maria degli Angeli, assuring him that perfect joy lay precisely in such acceptance;<sup>2</sup> he laid stress on it in the picture which he drew of himself being cast out of the Chapter as unworthy to preach to the brethren;<sup>3</sup> he pointed out that adversity was a test of the degree of interior patience that had been reached, and that it could not be properly gauged while there was complete contentment.<sup>4</sup> In the First Rule he required the brethren not to show resentment when they were taken ill, or to ask too eagerly for remedies, on the ground, it would appear, that in so doing they would be neglecting an opportunity for bodily discipline, and loving their body more than their soul. They were, on the contrary, to give thanks to God for all things, and accept their sickness or their health as equally manifestations of the divine will, in the assurance that that will erred in no way but sent physical suffering as

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 16; Bonaventure, ii, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers*, viii.

<sup>3</sup> *Mirror*, lxiv.

<sup>4</sup> *Writings*, p. 14, Admonition 13.

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a purgation and a discipline.<sup>1</sup> In his own case, St. Francis was faithful to the spirit of these recommendations. In the increased complications of his illness after the Stigmata, when his sister Pain scarcely left him for a moment, the brother who was attending him was so hurt by his suffering that he implored him to pray for some diminution of it. But "hearing this," St. Bonaventure remarks, "the holy man groaned, and cried out, saying: 'Did I not know the simple purity that is in thee, I would from henceforth have shunned thy company, for that thou hast dared to deem the divine counsels concerning me meet for blame.' " And throwing himself on the ground he kissed it, and cried: "I give Thee thanks, O Lord God, for all these my pains, and I beseech Thee, my Lord, that, if it please Thee, Thou wilt add unto them an hundredfold; for this will be most acceptable unto me if laying sorrow upon me Thou dost not spare, since the fulfilling of Thy holy will is unto me an overflowing solace." <sup>2</sup> For the rest, St. Francis' unwillingness to let pass by any occasion for subduing the clamours of his body, by seeking help from doctors, is almost proverbial. It was an immense labour to induce him to take the smallest remedy, and took all the powers of his friends' persuasion to get him to allow himself to be nursed for any of his numerous infirmities.<sup>3</sup>

It remains to consider St. Francis' view of chastity in the literal sense, as one branch of the general scheme of bodily subjugation. It will not be difficult of comprehension if it be remembered that on this side of his attempt his whole purpose was to avoid being impelled by his body to any action. There is no kind of evidence that he regarded any of the actions against which his asceticism was directed as

<sup>1</sup> First Rule, chap. x (*Writings*, p. 44). Cf. *Mirror*, xlii; Celano, ii, 175. Cf. Celano, ii, 69, as to the neglect of opportunity when pressed by need.

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, xiv, 2.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Mirror*, xci.



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bad in themselves, but there is every evidence that he struggled fiercely against allowing any of the desires which he considered as lower, to drive him to their satisfaction. Thus he does not appear to have gone, as in their enthusiasm some ascetics have done, to the extreme of regarding women as inherently or necessarily bad, but he made no secret of his feeling that they constituted a danger for men aiming at complete self-control. If the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven be a matter of attention and desire, the direction of these forces to any other thing without at least some very real capacity to transmute that thing by dedication of intention can only conduce to failure. And the more any particular object is liable to engross the attention and attract the desire to itself for its own sake, the more must the seeker after the Kingdom be wary in his dealings with it. And this is conspicuously the case with the question of the desire of sex. For a man with the naturally passionate temperament of St. Francis, in whose veins ran the ardent blood of mid-Italy and Provence, the desire for expression must have been almost overpowering. His whole life witnesses to the intensity of his nature, and to the intensity also of his efforts to overcome it.

There were only two women with whom his relations were in any way intimate. His biographers have little to say of the Lady Jacqueline of Settesoli, but it is known that he met her on a visit to Rome in 1212. On later visits the friendship ripened into intimacy, and it is suggested that St. Francis visited her when he was at Rome for the confirmation of his Second Rule.<sup>1</sup> The admiration which he felt for her is shown by his desire for her to be present during his last days, and to bring him clothes and a certain sweet she had made with her own hands.<sup>2</sup> His regard

<sup>1</sup> Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. ii, p. 224, and chap. xiii, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, cxii, and see Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 383, note 2.

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for her, however, seems to have been of a purely platonic nature, for on her arrival at Assisi he expressly relaxed in her favour the rule for the exclusion of women from Santa Maria degli Angeli, and allowed her to tend him during his last illness. His view of her is perhaps expressed more plainly than elsewhere in the fact that he called her "Brother Jacqueline"—a name which suggests vividly the relation of mutual understanding and good-fellowship which existed between them.<sup>1</sup>

With St. Clare, the other of the only two women whom he said he would be able to recognize if he looked at them,<sup>2</sup> the circumstances were different. Having begun by visiting her and her companions frequently after their installation at San Damiano, he gradually allowed longer periods to elapse between his visits, until finally he refrained from going there at all. So sternly, in fact, did he deny himself the pleasure of seeing her that his companions remonstrated with him for what seemed to them a want of kindness. His reply puts beyond a doubt his reasons for his conduct. He explained that it was not from lack of affection that he had ceased his visits, and hinted that it was rather because his affection was too vivid and the personal element was in danger of entering too greatly into the question. He was giving them an example of what they should do, and his point was that no one should offer to visit them of his own accord, but that the most reluctant of them should be appointed to do so. His own persistent and personal desire to see St. Clare was for him sufficient to disqualify him for the purpose, and he confined himself to watching over the spiritual welfare of her and her companions as well as he could from a distance.<sup>3</sup> In this desire to exclude

<sup>1</sup> See, as to the authenticity of this visit, *Opusculæ æ Critique Historique*, fasc. xv; *Examen Critique des Récits concernant la visite de Jacqueline de Settesoli à St. François*, by P. Sabatier.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 112.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 204, 205.

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all personal feeling from the relations between the brothers at Santa Maria degli Angeli and the sisters at San Damiano, St. Francis was unwavering. He sternly rebuked a brother who had two daughters among the followers of St. Clare and was anxious to act as messenger between them and St. Francis, sending in his place a brother who so disliked going that he at first flatly refused to do so. And when he once acceded to the importunities of his Vicar and consented to preach at San Damiano, he took the opportunity to place beyond all question the entirely impersonal nature of his visit. When he had arrived and the sisters were gathered round waiting for him to begin, he ordered ashes to be brought, and with them made a circle round him on the ground and covered his head. Finally, by way of sermon, he repeated the fifty-first psalm—that solemn declaration of self-abasement and passionate appeal for forgiveness—and straightway left the convent without another word.<sup>1</sup> His action signified what he so ardently desired—the death of his own passions, with the lifeless ashes of which he symbolically surrounded and covered himself—and in his choice of the psalm of self-accusation it is not fantastic to see a confession of what he regarded as the personal motives which had played their part in inducing him to come. “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me”: as he repeated these words may not St. Francis, with his peculiar sensibility and proneness to self-condemnation, have felt the application which they bore to his own position?

To attribute to him an affection for St. Clare which was not only that of her spiritual father, is in no way to derogate from his sanctity. It is rather to bring him within the ranks of those who felt and suffered with their fellow men, and not only made war upon their personal desire, but

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 206, 207.

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conquered it heroically. It is the view of him as passionless and without desire that removes him from kinship with humanity, and sacrifices to a mistaken desire for edification the highest and most inspiring probability.

Vowed, therefore, as he was to chastity, it is difficult to see what other course St. Francis could have taken than that of resolutely denying himself any intimacy with St. Clare. The *Fioretti* relate that on one occasion, at the suggestion of the brethren, he granted her wish to eat with him, and that when they were together at Santa Maria degli Angeli, they enjoyed amazing spiritual converse;<sup>1</sup> and towards the end of his life he stayed some little time at San Damiano when he was very ill;<sup>2</sup> but for the rest he allowed himself to see her practically not at all.

And apart from St. Clare, he was in general impressed more by the likelihood of women arousing in himself and his brethren the desires they had determined to quell, than of their contributing in any especial way towards spiritual progress. He included among the later additions to the Primitive Rule a warning to the brethren against the company of women, on just this ground, and ordained that any brother committing fornication should be expelled from the Order.<sup>3</sup> His own susceptibility no doubt increased his severity. The fight for complete control was a long and arduous one with him and needed constant vigilance, and the biographies recount a striking example of the dramatic way in which he battled with his desire. While he was at the hermitage of Sartiano, troubled by doubts as to whether he were not carrying his asceticism to too great an extreme, he was attacked (as his biographer

<sup>1</sup> *Little Flowers*, xv. The historicity of this episode is now denied. See, e.g., *The Life of St. Clare*, by Thomas of Celano (translated by Fr. Paschal Robinson), p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, c.

<sup>3</sup> First Rule, chaps. xii, xiii (*Writings*, pp. 46, 47).

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puts it) by a most grievous temptation of lust. In vain he scourged himself with the cord of his tunic, the ideas would not leave him. Seeing that something decisive was necessary he left his cell and went out naked into the snow that was deep on the ground. This he collected into seven large heaps, and offered them to himself as representing his wife and his children and his servants. The plan succeeded, but the need for it is sufficient proof of the force and insistence of the desires which he finally succeeded in overcoming.<sup>1</sup>

The presence of women must, then, have been a perpetual difficulty for him. But there is another side to his view of them, beside his fear of their effect on him. With his vivid imagination and naturally sacramental attitude he saw them as representing what was to him the highest of all—the spouse of Christ. As the soul is figured in the Song of Songs as the Beloved searching for her Lover, so St. Francis seems to have seen all women as possible representations of the mystic bride of the Eternal Lover. As such they were sacrosanct—infinately pure and immeasurably above the contamination of earthly lust. To look upon them with desire would be, for a fervent imagination kindled with a passion of love for Christ, to commit an unpardonable theft. “Who should not fear to look upon a bride of Christ?” he asked his brethren, when they enquired why he did not look at some women who had helped him in his need, and so expressed one of the fundamental ideas which regulated his treatment of them. In his parable of the two messengers sent by the king to his wife, of whom one brought back the bare answer and the other descanted also on her beauty and was forthwith dismissed by his master, St. Francis was inculcating the same high reverence for women as dedicated to a divine Lover.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 116, 117; Bonaventure, v, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 114; *Mirror*, lxxxvi.



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It was the positive side of his belief in the necessity for chastity, as his fear of their arousing personal desire was the negative side, and the one was the saving and vitalizing complement of the other.



## Chapter Eleven

**W**ITH CHASTITY ENDS THE CONSIDER-  
ation of the suppression of the lower self and its  
tendencies, which is one side of the method  
which mysticism employs for the attainment of  
its purpose. It is, however, admittedly the negative side,  
and as such needs for its completion an attitude which  
must be direct and positive. If the methods of mysticism  
were wholly negative—aimed at and concerned with anni-  
hilation solely—they would be insufficient as a direction for  
life simply because destruction *per se* is incapable of achiev-  
ing anything. But such a suppression is merely the pre-  
paration for the building which is to replace what has been  
destroyed. Its purpose is therefore that which follows it,  
and both it and its successor depend on the motive with  
which it has been undertaken. The motive supplies the  
positive attitude which is necessary, and in the case of  
mysticism both the one and the other are represented by the  
love which urges the mystic to make war on his lower self  
and supports him during his arduous campaign. Herein is  
his strength, herein is his defence, and herein the assurance  
of victory.

The love which animates the mystic is, in its clearest  
form, a vivid and intense love of God entering into every  
detail of his life. It is regarded as being in some sense  
implanted in every man—a view which is part and parcel  
of the belief that man is in his essence divine—and the  
purpose of the mystic is so to nourish it with daily care that  
it may eventually be brought to fruition. He specializes,  
as it were, in this one particular direction, and his desire is

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to be actuated by it and it alone in all his deeds. The spirit which inhabits him is by his hypothesis of a piece with the universal spirit of God: in consciousness in the spirit therefore will be consciousness of God. And just as he moves towards universality at the instigation of the spirit, so will he move towards that which is one with, and a condition of, deity. It is the essential oneness of nature between his spirit and God which provides him with the seed of what he has to perfect, and it is in proportion to his obedience to the dictates of the spirit—in proportion to his identification of himself therewith—that that oneness will be brought within the sphere of his consciousness. The love of man for God is the complement of the love of God for man: the desire of man for God is the claim of the spirit to rejoin its source, to flow out in all directions unrestrained by the barriers of self-hood and know again in conscious fact the spirit that permeates the universes. The mystic's belief is that between man's spirit and the spirit of God there is a continual interaction, that their love is a mutual love, and their attraction a mutual attraction: the Lover calls to the Beloved at all times and in every place until they are fully and without hindrance one.

In his endeavour to identify himself with the spirit, with the higher part rather than the lower, the mystic is thus aiming at an identification with what is universal. He is impelled thereto by the spirit itself, and chooses love as the positive means by which this identification is to be effected. Love, in the sense in which he employs the term, must therefore have in it something of the universal, something which makes against separateness in any and all of its aspects. Its characteristic in chief is that it is a replacing of the natural claim of the lower part to draw into itself on every possible occasion, by an impulse to give. Instead of the self being the centre of a man's cosmos to which all things are attracted, that self as a

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centre of attraction is annihilated, and in its place arises a centre from which all the desires flow outwards. The love which makes for universality thus depends on, and also in turn causes, a change in the direction of the currents of desire; they become centrifugal instead of centripetal, since that which they seek is no longer within the individual alone, but spread throughout the universe.

Love is thus the universal solvent. In its course outward it breaks down all the barriers that have been erected between one self and another: it is the arch-enemy of self-hood. It is also—as a loosener of bonds—the one ultimate guarantee of freedom from restriction. It is a love which partakes of the nature of adoration, of that passionate and overpowering desire for the good of that which is adored, which burns up in the intensity of its fire every shred of self-seeking. Such a love is compact of self-forgetfulness, instinct with self-sacrifice, and it is the heritage with which man is enriched. The immediate purpose of the mystic is so to free it from the bondage of the self-hood which prevents its full activity, that it may be manifested in his own life without veil or hindrance.

This complementary love of man for God is thus due to the spirit that is in him moving him towards its proper sphere of the universal, and its full manifestation is conditional on man endeavouring in every way to identify himself with the spirit. This manifestation will occur in direct proportion to the measure in which the spirit is permitted to be the final arbiter. But the God Whom the mystic loves is not remote in some distant heaven. He is everywhere, and the process of identification is an arduous one. It is by loving ardently and without thought of return that the mystic works; by taking up and encouraging, so to speak, every instigation to love which the spirit offers him, until the time comes when he stands aside entirely and the current of love flows through him unhindered.

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The omnipresence of the object of his love provides the mystic with opportunities for its exercise at all moments of his life and in every place in which he may find himself. He is not open to the accusation of confining his interests and directing his desire to some end apart from every aspect of the world in which he lives, for that world is on his own postulate swathed in, and interpenetrated by, deity, and it is to the divinity that underlies it that his love is offered. His is definitely the purpose of penetrating through the apparent to the Real, of effecting this penetration by the love which he manifests for the Real, and having done so, to live in the love which is part and parcel of the Real which he has thus found. In other words his aim is the Universal, and love is the means thereto precisely because of its universalizing action. And since the love which he feels is part of the universal heritage of the spirit, as he increases it by exercise he increases the realization of the spirit in his own consciousness. The hypothesis, therefore, is the love of God for man—of the spirit that is free and universal for the spirit that is labouring under the limitations of humanity; the desideratum is the love of man for God—the freeing of that spirit from its bondage and its entry into human consciousness, bringing with it all its treasure of love; the means is the love of man for man as the dwelling-place of God—the spirit of man piercing through the walls of separation and hailing as its essential kin the spirit in his fellows.

For to the mystic, and perhaps in particular to the Christian mystic, the knowledge of his own inherent divinity, the conviction that God dwells within him in the Kingdom that is within, gives the certainty that He is no less immanent in everyone who comes into the world, however much that Presence be obscured and overlaid. It is the invariable postulate despite all appearances to the contrary, and whatever the accretions of selfishness and



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materiality and degradation that hinder its manifestation. The Incarnation is for him a literal and continuing fact, not relegated to the mists of history, but ever present and overpoweringly real to-day and every day. It is, in fact, the one unfailing reality which is his continual inspiration and the foundation of all his hope—the earnest of the fuller realization that comes with the entry of That which is incarnated into the consciousness.

Any suggestion, therefore, of loving God apart from the man in whom He dwells is impracticable. The love of the one necessitates the love of the other, since they are bound together and are one in essence if not in realization. To love God is to love Him in all His aspects.

It may be questioned whether the divine and universal love which it is one of the aims of the mystic to manifest is of the same nature as the emotion which ordinarily goes by that name in the world. Granted even a tremendous increase in its intensity, it is not clear that the love of man for man becomes the same thing as the divine and spiritual love: it is not clear that the difference is only one of degree, and not, in some sense, of kind. It is, unquestionably, undesirable to insist on more distinctions than are necessary in dealing with an already sufficiently complicated subject, but in the present case a very general confusion exists owing to the use of the same word to signify two things between which there appear to be real differences. The line which divides the one from the other may appear in some respects to be tainted with artificiality, but if it make for lucidity on a matter of more than common importance, it will be worth while to inquire shortly in what these differences consist.

In the first place what may be called for the sake of convenience human love, tends to fall short precisely in respect of a quality which is an essential part of the love which is spiritual. It is seldom an unmingled outgiving—a pure stream of adoration flowing out to its object—

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unconcerned with anything that may return, even if that return be not in some sense a consideration for the original love. In how many cases does the lover wholly forget himself in his concentration on the other's good, and for how long does such complete self-forgetfulness continue—without demanding even a return of love—in the cases where at one time it existed? For the majority the reciprocity of love is a condition of its continuance, whether it be between man and woman or parent and child: there must, they would say, be a taking in for what they give out. Their love, that is, is so far from being disinterested that it is dependent on a return, however subtly that return be disguised, or however idealized it be.

Again, this lesser love is marked, as often as not, by an unmistakable degree of exclusiveness. It tends to be a love for one rather than for another, as though some particular human being were the meet recipient of love, and had a right to a monopoly of it all. It labours, in fact, in a vast number of cases under a kind of limitation which purposely excludes from its scope any but a chosen few, and concentrates its attention on them to the manifest detriment of the remainder. By so doing it becomes not a final solvent, a breaker-down of barriers, but in effect a power which binds together the chosen few and separates them off from all the rest of the world. The tendency is perhaps chiefly evident in the love of a man for his country, but it exists largely in less expected spheres, such as the love of a mother for her child. And its action is, so far, antithetical to that of the love which is all-comprehending and universal. The unexpressed supposition at the root of such a limitation would seem to be that the source from which such love flows is exhaustible, so that in squandering it among the world at large there is a danger of famine, whereas the love of the spirit is by the hypothesis inexhaustible by its very nature. It grows with spending, and

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when it has embraced all the universes is fuller, richer, and more essentially active than in its period of repression. This is the wideness of spiritual love, by which it is impossible for it to entertain any idea of exclusion, any conception of loving one to the barring out of another.

Yet it is not that it loves a greater number than the human love, but that it loves them differently. The universality which is its essence cannot be reached by extending the human love until it embraces the whole world, any more than infinity can be reached by continually adding one unit to another. It is of a nature which, when it is experienced, opens the doors to infinity indeed, for to be able to love anyone with the love of the spirit is to love the whole world with that same love. Because it flows from the spirit, its knowledge depends on consciousness in the spirit, and to be conscious in the spirit is to be able to recognize the same spirit everywhere and at all times, and send out to it a stream of love which is all wide and all pure. For the spirit is everywhere and always, and love rays out from it as spontaneously as light from the sun. Love is, in fact, the only currency which the spirit recognizes, which it has never and can never repudiate. To attempt, therefore, to include all the world within the embrace of human love is a project which is fated to failure. For spiritual love, founded as it is on a consciousness and understanding of the essence of all things is, so to speak, continually and automatically exercised; it springs from the font of things; but the love of man for man, love he never so strongly, has no such foundation of ultimate comprehension but is forced by its own limitations to deal with appearances.

Finally, human love differs from spiritual by its dependence on a certain sympathy with the object loved. It is subject to preferences, picking and choosing on a basis of harmony which is largely concerned with externals. Agreement on a thousand and one matters of varying importance

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—opinions, beliefs, traditions, ambitions, tastes—a certain reciprocal fulfilment: these things are conditions precedent to its exercise and enter into its enjoyment. With the love of the spirit it must necessarily be otherwise. It acts, as has been said, automatically, and extends as naturally towards one who on the human basis of judgment is profoundly unsympathetic as to a most harmonious friend; it is, in a word, a love which loves anyone whatever simply because he is. However distasteful his whole personality, the spirit must recognize the spirit within him, must realize that he is as essentially divine as the greatest of the saints, and, just because this is intimately known, because it is part of the inmost consciousness and not merely an intellectual proposition on its outskirts, must recognize him for what he is in spite of the veils of his personality. And such recognition must be simultaneous with the outflow of love, irrespective and regardless of all else. Love—it is said—springs from understanding, and the understanding of the spirit is fundamental. It neither represents the condition of non-resentment nor has it anything in common with the frigid attitude which allows the possibility of good in others in spite of its disagreement with them. It is not passive, but vigorously active; not negative, but positive; it does not tolerate, but acclaims; it does not permit, but embraces. It is not forgiveness, but love.

It is possible that the whole distinction may be objected to on the ground that love is love all the worlds over, and that as it will be in heaven so it is, as a foretaste thereof, on earth. And, while it is impossible to concede this, there does not seem any room for doubt that what has been called human love is beyond comparison the best preparation for the attainment of spiritual love. It is important to realize that—notwithstanding the deeply rooted differences that have been noticed—human love partakes, in certain of



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its aspects, of the characteristic of that which is divine.

The assumption is that consciousness in the spiritual part is gained at the price of self-forgetfulness, and in so far as human love results in such self-forgetfulness, it leads its possessor nearer to spiritual consciousness and nearer, accordingly, to the possibility of experiencing spiritual and universal love. To the extent to which human love is an outgiving only, without any ulterior thought, to that extent it partakes of the nature of spiritual love, and by its solvent action breaks down the walls of the self-hood and prepares the way to the consciousness of the spirit. Further, in so far as it produces an interest in and an affection for something outside the mere limited self of him who loves, it has a certain value as increasing the sphere of his concerns. Its influence is in this sense widening, but it is not a widening that approaches universality, simply because that is only reached by penetration to what is universally present. And the only thing which can be conceived as universal in any sense is the spirit. Universal love, in other words, results in love for everyone, but love for everyone (so far as it can be attained) does not result in universal love. And in truth it is not possible to arrive completely at a love for everyone in the normal human way, for humanly speaking love depends on knowledge, and the knowledge of humanity is necessarily limited. Below a state of consciousness in the spirit it may be possible to stand in readiness to extend love to every comer, but it would seem that in that higher consciousness the love is active whether its recipient be humanly known or not.

The relation between the one and the other appears, then, as one of preparation. The lower, being tinged at times with something of the grace and inclination towards wideness of the higher, will gradually make the latter possible by its increase of these qualities through perfect



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dedication. In general they stand in very much the same mutual relation as meditation and contemplation. As meditation consists in an activity of the mind searching for comprehension of a particular point, and using every resource of the reason in trying to achieve it, and contemplation consists in an utter stillness of the mind, a cessation of the working of reason so that a higher light than its own may shine through and illuminate the darkness; and as the one normally must precede the other; so human love at its highest, in spite of its limitations and because it is in some measure a pure outgiving, prepares the way for consciousness in the spirit and the inexhaustible stream of love which flows therefrom. Meditation thinks of a thing, contemplation knows it: the human love loves some with varying degrees of disinterestedness, the spiritual loves all in purity.

Since the means and the motive of the mystic are love, it follows that there will be as the basis of his life a conception of what love demands on all occasions, of what it brings in the train of these demands on him, and of the attitude which it compels him to take towards both God and man. Just as his life should be a manifestation of love, so it will bear the impress of love's ruling to the extent to which he is true to his dedication. And the essence of love's ruling has found no higher expression than that which it received at the hand of St. Paul when he wrote that it vaunteth not itself, that it is not puffed up, that it seeketh not its own. This is love in its perfection, in its own astounding humility and purity.

Such a humility may therefore be looked for in the mystic. In whatever direction he is liable to achieve results which mark him off from the generality of mankind he may be expected to exhibit the lowliness by virtue of which love neither vaunts itself, nor is puffed up. Now, the particular sphere in which the mystic achieves success is in that of the spiritual progress which leads to the knowledge of God.

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By the evidence of all the saints this progress is marked by occurrences which stand in a category by themselves: they have little connection or none with the events which fill the lives of the majority of men, for the reason that the majority of men do not lay themselves open to receive them. As a result of his general and detailed dedication of his whole life, of the sanctification which he imports into it by the direction he gives it, and because of the long hours he gives to genuine prayer and meditation, the mystic—and the saint in so far as he is also a mystic—throws open his doors to communications of a kind apart. They come to him in proportion as his sense of self-hood decreases, and flood his whole being with a sense of freedom and life. They may come, the records show, at any time and in any place: before the vast splendour of nature or in the cloistered silence of devotion; in what seems a chance and unpremeditated concentration, or in the offices of praise; but always they come when the way has been opened by a forgetfulness of the self, and always therefore with the splendour of a great surprise. They are, perhaps, less communications than experiences, but they are experiences in which communications come, and the mystic goes out from the Presence-chamber with another veil raised from his eyes and a new certainty in his heart. It may fade, it may seem to recede into the mists of the external world, and the veil may seem gradually to gather again and dim his sight, but he retains the unalterable conviction that the veil was truly, if but for a moment, raised, and he goes forward in the knowledge of this with a new hope and something more than faith.

There is not—there cannot be, in the nature of things—any definition of the form such experiences will take. They must vary with the temperament, the outlook, the religious upbringing of each individual. With St. Teresa the experience took again and again the form of a vision,

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accompanied very often by the hearing of voices, and with St. Catherine of Genoa it came as a vision on one occasion in her life. With Boehme it came as a sudden sight into and comprehension of the foundations of things, as also to Ignatius Loyola, while to Brother Lawrence it appeared as "a high view of the providence and power of God," which kindled in him a love for God which continued unbroken all his life. To the Lady Julian the experience took the form of a vision of Christ speaking from the Crucifix which was held before her in her extreme illness, wherefrom she received the communications which constitute her revelations; with Pascal it appeared as an experience of fire which lasted for two hours, and brought with it an indelible sensation of certainty and joy and peace. It is immaterial for the moment whether these experiences be the experiences of Conversion or Illumination, of the first flash of Union or the last supreme adventure of the Spiritual Marriage: they stand in a class apart, and comprise a series of phenomena with which mankind in general is unacquainted.

The normal result of any singular achievement is some measure of pride. A species of self-congratulation follows on success almost as a matter of course—a warm and comfortable feeling of repose well earned, and a glowing reflection on the prowess which achieved such success. In the mind of the hypothetical man in the street self-satisfaction is earned as a right by achievement. The peculiarity of the mystic, in so far as he adheres to the principles of his unexpressed creed, is that this is not so with him. At the risk of exalting him to improbable heights it must be insisted that (to the extent, again, to which he is successful) it does not enter into his consciousness to count his spiritual progress to himself for righteousness. Despite the heroic struggles which he makes—for it cannot be said that life offers no opportunity for heroism while the self

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remains unconquered—and the great victories and advances he achieves, they are not to him grounds for self-satisfaction under any guise. He is forced to the realization that his struggles and advances are made at the instigation of the spirit, and that to the spirit therefore is due the honour of the victory. For it is by the force of the spirit that he conquers. And it is the knowledge of this in the mystic which causes him to receive the strange sweetnesses of contemplation without reference to any imaginary prowess on his part which may have contributed to their gift, and enables him to experience the rare sense of intimacy and the vivid joy of the divine communications with a great gratitude, but with no trace of pride. For again, and it is the explanation of all his improbabilities, he is inspired by love and his life is shaped according to its precepts; and love vaunteth not itself, neither is it puffed up.

But beside these occurrences, which are of the essence of the mystical life understood as the widening or intensification of the consciousness until it shall be one with God, there are certain incidents of it which are too often mistaken for essentials. Under the general heading of mystical phenomena fall the thousand and one vagaries of the human consciousness when it is confronted with strange conditions, and the way which it takes in the course of its progress is through a region that is largely uncharted. Such incidents are legion: they comprise the innumerable visions which are recorded in the history of mysticism and the annals of sanctity, the locutions which have been heard under countless different circumstances conveying an amazing variety of messages, the revelations received, the levitations seen and experienced, the perfumes smelt, the music heard, and the bodily woundings which have been suffered. They bring with them (or, more probably, evidence) in many cases a felicity which is inexpressible,



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and it is just the feeling of delight with which they are associated that invests them with a certain danger. The point to be kept in mind is that they are accidents of the mystical life, and accidents more particularly of the path of contemplation. It cannot be held on any ground that they are necessary to spiritual advance, although it be possible to believe that they present themselves very frequently to those who have no other purpose than that advance, and that they are in some cases of value. It does not, in fact, seem open to question that when they are received in a state of extreme depression they may act very definitely as encouragements and consolations. They may be as a ray of light striking across the utter darkness of the mystic's outlook, or as a house of rest amid the heat and dust of his way, and so give him strength and hope to go on, but they are not for this reason necessary. The alleviation that they bring is not indispensable any more than their messages are final.

This view is put with unmistakable clearness by St. John of the Cross. He explains that before the coming of Christ and the entire revelation which that coming constituted, it was not only permissible, but desirable, that man should seek the knowledge of God by ways which he calls supernatural. He regards the coming, however, as having given all that is necessary to be known, and any further curiosity as an impertinence. His view is almost breathlessly orthodox, for he is at pains throughout his treatment of the subject to point out that one of the great dangers of extraordinary ways is that they may lead the individual to the belief that it is possible to gain some knowledge of the truth without the mediumship of the Church, but his conclusion is the conclusion of all mysticism. He desires the spiritual director to impress upon his penitent that one good work done in charity is more precious in the eyes of God than that which all the visions imaginable could



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produce, and that there are many souls who have never had a vision in their lives who are beyond comparison more advanced than those in whose lives visions have been frequent.<sup>1</sup> The Lady Julian of Norwich gives expression to the same belief. She prefaces her amazing *Revelations of Divine Love* by the statement that "because of the Shewing I am not good but if I love God the better: and in as much as ye love God the better, it is more to you than to me. I say not this to them that be wise, for they wot it well; but I say it to you that be simple, for ease and comfort. . . . For truly it was not shewed me that God loved me better than the least soul that is in grace; for I am certain that there be many that never had Shewing nor sight but of the common teaching of Holy Church, that love God better than I."<sup>2</sup> In both these mystics, as in countless others, there is a common insistence on love as the sole necessity, and the view—either expressed or implied—that the extraordinary ways of the spirit may be added to, but are never necessary for, the soul's perfection.

There is no occasion here to enter into a discussion either of the nature or the manner of working of the phenomena which it is part of the province of mystical theology to analyse and—so far as it can—to explain. If they be, as seems most probable, the forms in which messages and intimations are received from the great reservoir of sub-consciousness, it is clear that they are neither safe guides in themselves nor evidences of any peculiar sanctity. For the subconscious region must be conceived as containing not only the highest of which man is capable, but also the lowest: as holding within it not only the potential God, but the potential beast. Ease of access to it in general conse-

<sup>1</sup> *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, book ii, chaps. xxi, xxii. See also H. Joly, *The Psychology of the Saints*, chap. iii, wherein the author deals at length with extraordinary phenomena from the Catholic standpoint.

<sup>2</sup> *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. ix.

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quently evidences a peculiar psychic temperament rather than anything especially holy, and a psychic temperament which may be a dangerous possession as easily as a blessing. Its peculiarity lies obviously in its susceptibility, and by the increase of this susceptibility powers may be gained which will place their possessor far enough from the rank and file of mankind, but not necessarily in the ranks of sanctity. The value of such powers is not under dispute, any more than the excellence of the uses to which they can be put or their interest for the student of psychology, but for the mystic they constitute a by-path. His formula would be that spiritual progress may produce them, but they do not produce, or finally evidence, spiritual progress. It is in consequence of this that the saints, who were and are, after all, by way of being experts in the spiritual life, and examples, in some cases, of mysticism at its highest level, prayed with peculiar fervour not to be led by the way of such phenomena. They realized that just because of the delight and the satisfaction that was to be found in the experience of them there was a danger of their being sought as ends in themselves, as well as of their producing in their possessors the pride which they were intent on avoiding. And if this seem an undue timidity on their part, or an unnecessary and slavish fear of risking their souls' welfare in return for what might have been of inestimable advantage, it is only necessary to look round even at the present day and see what havoc is wrought by the search after psychic powers, to be convinced of their high wisdom. It needs not only a profound dedication, but a very balanced and exceptionally clear mind to undertake safely the responsibility of their possession, and the saints had no desire to take gratuitous risks which they saw any possibility of avoiding. Their purpose was the noumenon, and phenomena were therefore a superfluity.

The earnest desire of the greatest among them to avoid

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such ways is the common theme of writers on mystical theology. Thus Scaramelli goes to the extent of saying that visions, locutions, revelations, and prophecies are extremely dangerous and not very useful. He advises the Director to instruct any penitent who may be beginning to experience them to pray with the utmost fervour to be led by some safer way. He quotes St. Teresa<sup>1</sup> in support of this advice, to the effect that she prayed with all her might to be led by some other way, and that this lasted some two years and was the subject of all her prayers. Scaramelli points out the difficulty of escaping some kind of self-satisfaction and of remaining wholly detached when such experiences are common, and assures his readers that there is no way more pernicious or more open to deceit.<sup>2</sup> Devine is of the same opinion, and gives as his authority the *Treatise on Heroic Virtue* of Benedict XIV. This work quotes St. Bonaventure as saying that it seems safer not to seek them, and not to trust them too readily when they are offered. They should be esteemed "lightly, as less profitable," and Gerson and St. Philip advise that they should be definitely renounced and repelled.<sup>3</sup> Poulain rests the same counsel on St. Teresa's opinions in different parts of her writings. In her *Life*<sup>4</sup> she states that she never asked for any revelation from God, and adds that if she had done so she would think at once that any revelation which came must be a delusion. In the *Interior Castle*, speaking of locutions, she maintains that in the beginning it is always wiser to resist them, and later, of visions, says: "I most earnestly advise you, when you hear of God bestowing these graces on others, that you never pray nor desire to be led by this way yourself, though it may appear to you to be

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, chap. xxv, sec. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Il Direttorio Mistico*, tratt. iv, cap. iv, secs. 41-3.

<sup>3</sup> Devine, *A Manual of Mystical Theology*, pp. 506, 507.

<sup>4</sup> Relation viii, sec. 22.

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very good: indeed, it ought to be highly esteemed and revered, yet no one should seek to go by it for several reasons." And a few pages later she adds that the recipient of these and similar favours does not therefore merit more glory, and that many saints never received any of them, while others who did receive them are not saints at all.<sup>1</sup>

References to similar pronouncements could be multiplied almost indefinitely, but those that have been given suffice to show the unimportance in which mystical phenomena *per se* have been held by those who were most fitted to judge of them. There is the probability that such opinions have been influenced by the fear of the Roman Church lest its members should elude its authority by dependence on personal communications, but there is the certainty also that the mystics were fundamentally sincere in their recognition of the danger of the recipients of such favours becoming inflated with a sense of their own importance. It is an evidence of their desire to shape their lives on the principles and according to the dictates of love at its highest. It is the manner in which they avoided deviation from the direct way which led to their goal, passing lightly by whatever might detain them by its inherent attractiveness. They desired one thing, and one thing only; they knew by their own internal conviction and by the evidence of centuries that the way to that thing was by fulfilling their lives with love and directing them according to all its implications, and first and foremost among such implications was the necessity of not vaunting themselves on account of anything, or dallying with any incidents by which they might be puffed up.

<sup>1</sup> *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, chap. iii, sec. 3; chap. ix, secs. 13 and 19. See A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, chap. xxiii, and the extracts following it.



## Chapter Twelve

**J**UST AS ST. FRANCIS' LIFE APPEARS, when regarded from one point of view, to constitute a prolonged and eventually successful struggle to overcome the tendencies of his lower self, so, when examined from a standpoint which sees more deeply into that which prompted such a struggle, it appears as instinct at every turn with an overwhelming love. In the event, it has been seen, the movement towards self-annihilation is inseparable from love since, by all the hypotheses, the supreme characteristic of the spirit which prompts it is a love which nothing can finally limit, and even the passing austerities of asceticism are one of the forms which that love assumes in its ceaseless striving towards its end. For love cannot be the cause only of such things as seem pleasant to the mind of humanity. Working in concealment, and sometimes by such devious ways that it is difficult to recognize it as love at all, it must include within the sphere of its activity the necessary severities against whatever hinders it: it is not simply acquiescence, but vigorous action. And in its manifestation it is not, so to speak, a simple substance, but is compounded of severity and mercy.

Thus in the case of St. Francis it is not too much to say that his continuing motive was love. It was at the root of all his self-subjugation, the source of all his splendour, and the cause of all his power. It is not necessary to recall in detail the incidents of his attempt to accomplish his self-annihilation, since they constitute the substance of the foregoing chapters, but in certain of them the love by



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which he was inspired is particularly in evidence. One of the incidents which remained most vividly in his own mind was the violent attempt he had made at the beginning of his new life to overcome his instinctive repugnance to lepers. It will be remembered that while riding near Assisi he met a leper on the road, and that instead of making his departure as rapidly as possible (as he had been in the habit of doing) he dismounted and gave him money and kissed his hands. This was the beginning of a care for those suffering from leprosy which lasted all his life.<sup>1</sup> In this episode and its subsequent developments is a clear example of the way in which with St. Francis love was at the root of his self-annihilation, and his self-annihilation was expressed in love. It is not possible to regard him as concerned solely with the effort to overcome his own feelings in his first salutation of the leper by the roadside, or in the hideous details of his attentions to them in the lazar-houses afterwards. There must have been, at the side of and sustaining the effort, a force of love outflowing to them: a force which would break down his repugnance and enable him to attend them, and eventually spend itself in the care which he lavished on them. The point is that it could not express itself until it had abolished, and except by abolishing, that which stood between it and its object. And as this was so in the individual case, so it is in all cases and everywhere. Sacrifice without love is fundamentally a contradiction in terms: it is replaced at highest by considerations of expediency and at the lowest by self-seeking undisguised.

The same attitude is palpably underlying the occasions on which St. Francis expressed himself both by word and by deed as to the necessity for giving to those poorer than himself, and for considering all property as held in common.<sup>2</sup> On the surface they most obviously point to the aboli-

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> See chap. vi.



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tion of the sense of propriety, but that which abhors and militates against the separateness is the spirit of love which is universal. St. Francis, it would seem, realizing in how great a degree property divided, on every occasion took the most obvious steps to manifest the love which was in him. By letting fall all claim to ownership he was enabled to do this with a fulness which otherwise had been impossible. As, in the case of the lepers, the self-annihilation was necessitated by and founded on love, so with the beggars to whom he would give his clothes and his food with a regularity that disturbed his brethren, he was enabled by so doing to liberate and give expression to his love; and in the end he was so filled and compact of love that he knew in himself that universality which from the beginning he had ardently desired.<sup>1</sup>

But beside the teaching and the numerous definite actions which by implication depend on love for their efficacy, there is in St. Francis' life a quality which cries aloud that love was its one and only source. It stands, together with his great simplicity, in the minds of those who have learned to know him with any intimacy, as being in a supreme degree characteristic, and as that by which his true followers may be known now as in the period of his life. Joy was for him essential: it was not a quality to be added to any other attitude of life as a convenient companion, but was in effect the one attitude which was tolerable. He could not, and would not, permit his

<sup>1</sup> Father Cuthbert (*Life*, pp. 157, 158) has well pointed out that the width and fervour of St. Francis' love are exemplified by the spirit in which he undertook the journey to the Holy Land. It was for him a spiritual crusade instead of a crusade of arms, and was founded on the love he bore to the infidel rather than on the prevalent belief that they were an evil race which called for extermination by the sword. His purpose was not to wrest from them by force the land of Christ's ministry, but to carry to them the great news of Christ's continual reality.

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brethren to take life grudgingly: he would have them accept it gladly and with open arms as a gift beyond price, not resenting its difficulties or magnifying its failures, but welcoming it as proof and evidence of the boundless goodness of the Giver. It was not in him to pick and choose between the details of such a gift. His acceptance was complete. His whole life bears witness to the fact that he received whatever came as from the hand of God, in the knowledge that it was therefore good and as such a fit reason for joy, without reference to what might or might not be his natural personal feelings.

Such an attitude, it should be remarked, does not make for a placid passivity in face of life's problems. St. Francis, as few others, recognized that the world as it presented itself to his view in his own particular time was in vital need of reformation, and he devoted the genius of his life to bettering it in the way which appeared to him most radical. It suffered then, as it suffers now, from not knowing God, and what he did was done with the aim of remedying this defect to the full extent of his powers for his own time and, within the measure of possibility, for that which came after him. He specialized, that is, as all mystics have done, in the life of the spirit, and laboured to bring men into conformity with the life in which that spirit should be paramount. All his self-control, all his praying, all his teaching by word and by deed, had this one end in view: from the period when he turned back from his journey to Apulia in obedience to the voice which he heard in a dream, to the moment of his death on the bare ground of the cell at Santa Maria degli Angeli, his life was a continual effort to effect this one thing only by all the means which lay in his power. But with this recognition of the need for the world's betterment went an unfaltering conviction of the wisdom which overruled it. He realized, there would seem no reason to doubt, that that wisdom



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worked through human activity: that men were the agents of the world's reform, and therefore bound to unravel as far as possible the purposes of that wisdom and work in conformity with it. Hence his own efforts. But when such efforts had reached their limit, when humanity had done in all sincerity its utmost to bring to perfection the divine purpose, it was incumbent on it to accept whatever the result might be as part of the supreme ordinance. His own work was to increase the sincerity and the enthusiasm with which humanity joined in this purpose: there can be no questioning that to such a passionate follower of Christ's life the final word was always: Not my will, but Thine, be done.

With such a view, founded as it necessarily is on a certainty of the love of God, life must have been a continual source of joy. But in the glad acceptance of events the conviction of the love of God for man must go hand in hand with a full and unfaltering love of man for God. Whatever be the source from which occurrences finally come, there can be no joy in their reception unless the source be sincerely loved. Without such love they will be received at the best with resignation, and at the worst with resentment. To the extent that joy is an evidence of love, there is thus in St. Francis' insistence on its necessity a keen realization of its implications. The imaginary picture drawn by him of the ill-treatment of himself and Brother Leo on their return to the Portiuncula has already been referred to as showing the emphasis he laid on the need for self-conquest:<sup>1</sup> it points no less certainly to the conviction that the perfection of joy lay in the glad acceptance of whatever was meted out to them. It was to be accepted simply because it came from outside them, from an immediate source over which they had no control: it lay

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 43.

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in their power either to accept it with perfect joy as part of the ordinance of God, or to resent it. The second alternative was not possible if they believed in the all-seeing love of God and returned that love with all the power of their natures; for then joy must flow from them as water from the struck rock.

The corollary of this acceptance of whatever comes as from the hand of God is a position which to many must seem grotesque. To the mystic who is passionately desirous of God it must often seem that a life of comparative contentment, a life in which necessities are at hand and nothing is very far to seek, where one day follows another with a certain placidity, is the least desirable condition possible. He is by his nature anxious for opportunities to prove his devotion—anxious for a chance of showing his unfailing love for God by letting it burn undiminished in the midst of difficulties and darkness. He would be in agreement with the writer of the *Theologia Germanica*, that man is safe either in the hell or the heaven of life, but that in any intermediate state he is most dangerously placed.<sup>1</sup> If all be easy and everything at hand it is felt that though resentment be easily avoided, love is not very easily felt. By a turn of his nature the mystic who is inspired by this view may feel, since vividness brings vividness in its train, that he will be more true to his dedications in suffering than in such contentment, and, to a high degree, that as it is the lower self alone that is capable of suffering, the more that it is called upon to undergo, the more effectually will it be crushed out. He will desire difficulties, then, as other men will desire ease, so that his love may be put to the test, that it may be galvanized into vital action, that his undesirable tendencies may be annihilated, and that his joyful acceptance may be a real and actual thing.

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. xi.

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Actuated by a similar impulse, St. Francis admonished his brethren that they should rejoice when they fell into temptation, and bore some afflictions of soul or body in this world for the sake of eternal life.<sup>1</sup> Iron is strengthened, as gold is purified, by fire, and without temptation man is of little avail. He did not, that is, confine his desire for difficulties to the hardships which he might suffer externally and at the hands of the world: he longed ardently to increase the strength of his love and his will by battling against interior foes. It was quite clear to him that a man was not in any way proved, and therefore sure of himself, if his path lay in easy lands. Tribulation was therefore not only what the servant of God might expect, but what he should desire. Even the devils, he explained to his companion when he had himself been suffering intensely one night, "are the officers whom God appoints to punish excesses," and he accounted it for a token of God's grace when a man was purified by suffering from all his offences while he was in this world.

But St. Francis went farther than this. He regarded the severity of the temptation as an evidence of the degree of virtue and certainty which had been attained, "for," as he said, "hard fights scarcely ever present themselves, except when virtue has been perfected." Secure in the belief that man would not be tempted beyond his strength, and that the recognition as a temptation of a tendency in some direction pointed at least to a high ideal with which the tendency would, so to speak, be compared, he felt a certain disdain for those who, as he said, "hug themselves over their long-standing merits and rejoice in having undergone no temptations." His was, indeed, a sacramentalizing of

<sup>1</sup> First Rule, chap. xvii (*Writings*, p. 51). Cf. Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, book i, chap. x, sec. 63: "Finally thou art to know that the greatest Temptation is to be without Temptation, wherefore thou oughtest to be glad when it shall assault thee."

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temptation, a recognition of both its necessity and its worth. "Verily I say unto thee that no one should deem himself a servant of God until he has passed through temptations and tribulations. Temptation conquered is in some sort the ring whereby the Lord espouses to Himself the soul of his servant." As such he did not accept it with resignation as a thing at best to be borne without resentment, but acclaimed its advent with joy.<sup>1</sup> How, in fact, can it be possible to fail in this joy if love for the Giver of all things be paramount, and how is it possible to counterfeit it if such love be absent?

St. Francis experienced it almost from the beginning. When he was wandering on the slopes of Monte Subasio, and was attacked and thrown into a snowdrift by a band of robbers, he accepted it as part of the proving of a new knight of God, not only as an opportunity for rising superior to physical discomfort, but with the joy that had its source in his entire love for the God from whom all events ultimately came. He exulted in it simply because it was. Joy welled up in him almost unceasingly, with fluctuations from time to time at first, it may be imagined, but always with greater or less force. At times it became so insistent that he was compelled to give some expression to it: he was carried away as with the unlimited gladness of a child. It is probable that on several of the occasions on which this is recorded of him he was under the spell of a definite spiritual experience, of which the ineffable greatness swept all before it, as when the brethren said of him that he was "as one drunk with the spirit" shortly after his experience before the Crucifix in the church of San Damiano. He had come "into a very intoxication of the divine love,"<sup>2</sup> and had for the time lost his ordinary consciousness of the surrounding world; but on other

<sup>1</sup> See Celano, ii, 118, 119; *Mirror*, lxvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Legend*, 21.

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occasions the joy that was in him welled up and overflowed, as it were, spontaneously. He would then seize on whatever was nearest—two sticks lying on the ground—and therewith improvise a violin. And as he played on his soundless instrument he would give vent to his overwhelming joy—"to the veins of murmuring which he heard secretly with his ears," as Brother Leo puts it—by singing aloud the praises and the splendour of God. He sang in French, as the language which he continually used at moments of overpowering emotion,<sup>1</sup> and so gave relief and expression to the torrent of joy that was in him. It seems to have been utterly spontaneous and utterly unconscious: the result of an overpowering need of giving vent to the love that he felt for God and man and every manifested thing. And at the end his joy would overcome him with its fervour, and he would break into tears of adoration before the splendour that he saw.<sup>2</sup>

It must have been a similar feeling for the high mystery of the love of God which caused him never to refuse anything which was asked in that name. It constituted an appeal that he could not resist, and his determination never to deny the gift when the request was made in this form dates from the early days of his life. Before he had dedicated himself to the new life of the spirit, before, in fact, he had left his father's house to make his own new way

<sup>1</sup> As, for example, when he was at Rome for the first time, and took his place among the beggars in front of St. Peter's, and asked for alms in French. The action must have required considerable courage, and caused him a certain exaltation on its accomplishment. See *Legend*, 10. Also on the occasion when he overcame his shyness in begging for oil for the lamps at San Damiano, he asked for it in French, in the revulsion of joy which came over him as a result of his self-conquest. See above, pp. 49 *et seq.* Emotion would attach to French—or Provençal rather—in his mind, as it was the language of the troubadours for whose songs he had so great an affection.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 127; *Mirror*, xciii.



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across the world, he was standing in the shop one day when a passing beggar asked alms for the love of God. At the moment he refused, but a little while after was so struck by the churlishness of his act that he made up his mind never to refuse in future a similar appeal. He reflected that if the beggar had asked in the name of, and depending on, his respect for some powerful baron of the neighbourhood, to refuse would have been the last thing to occur to him; and he blamed himself even then for such a discourtesy to God.<sup>1</sup> His biographies witness that he was faithful to his determination, and it would appear—as is only natural—that his tenderness for such an appeal increased with time. Any misuse of the words distressed him, and he would rebuke any brother who spoke them lightly. “So very high and very precious is the love of God,” he would say, “that it should never be named save seldom and in great necessity, and with much reverence.”<sup>2</sup> To the brethren who occasionally remonstrated with him he put it with a touch of his habitual southern fantasy and largeness, and declared that it was a noble prodigality to offer such payment as the love of God in return for the alms that were asked. The giving, and the attitude which gave gladly at such a demand, appeared to him, it may well be believed, as in some way a letting loose from its normal restrictions of the great love which surrounded him. The love which sought no return, but went out spontaneously to all around it, was put into motion by the request and its granting, and the manifestation of the love of God was, in actual fact, the result. For the rest, the very words “the love of God” came to have in his mind so great a significance and appeal that he could never hear them without being touched by the sweetness that they held. He would “undergo a kind of transformation; for immediately on

<sup>1</sup> *Legend*, 3; Celano, i, 17; Bonaventure, i, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, xxxiv.

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hearing those words he was aroused, stirred, inflamed, as though some inner chord of his heart were being touched by the plectrum of an outward voice." They responded, that is, to what was the essence and the meaning of his life, and called forth from within him as by a sympathetic vibration an answer to that which he saw everywhere. He summed up all that was most precious and vivid and real to him in words of which the sweetness and poignancy are as alive to-day as when he said them: "The love of Him who loved us much, is much to be loved." Herein were to St. Francis the cause of all, the method of all, and the end to which all must tend.<sup>1</sup> In its entirety it meant the cessation of himself and his fulfilment by God; an exultant death in the consuming flames of love. "I beseech Thee, O Lord," he prayed, "that the fiery and sweet strength of Thy love may absorb my soul from all things that are under heaven, that I may die for love of Thy love as Thou didst deign to die for love of my love."<sup>2</sup>

And as he experienced in his own life the joy of love, so he hailed it in the lives of his brethren. On one occasion, when he was at Santa Maria degli Angeli, he saw one of his companions returning from Assisi with the alms that he had begged, rejoicing aloud as he came. That the brother should give such manifest signs of the joy that St. Francis always desired was one of the keenest delights that could be given him. In great joy himself, therefore, he ran out to meet him, and took his load on to his own shoulder until they reached the dwelling of the brethren. "Thus," he said, in his exuberance at so signal an example of what he consistently taught, "thus I would that a brother of mine should go out and return with alms, glad and joyful and praising God."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, when he was himself

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 196; Bonaventure, ix, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Prayer to Obtain Divine Love (*Writings*, p. 145).

<sup>3</sup> *Mirror*, xxv; Celano, ii, 76.

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tempted to sadness, he could find in the gladness of his fellows a recall to the exterior and interior joy which with the greatest longing he desired to know and feel in them and in himself.<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which St. Francis definitely taught the desirability of joy to his followers is proverbial. Since in his mind it was inseparable from love, in impressing on them the need for its encouragement he was presupposing, as well as preparing the way for, love. He gave it in the form of an admonition at one of the Chapters, and afterwards included it in the First Rule as an addition to the primitive counsels. "Let the brethren beware of showing themselves outwardly sullen and gloomy hypocrites, but let them show themselves rejoicing in the Lord, merry, and joyful, and gracious, as is meet."<sup>2</sup> And when any of the brethren looked sad or downcast he would rebuke him as though for some evident misdemeanour. The ground on which the rebuke rested was that it was not fitting for a servant of God to show himself sad before men: his distress and regret for his sins should be confined to the privacy of his own room, and all gloom should be put aside when he appeared in public.<sup>3</sup> They whom he would have known as the minstrels of God must clothe themselves with joy as with a garment, showing forth by their actions and their life how gracious was the service that they owed. Every time a brother went gladly through the world it was a living sermon, better than any preached with the tongue, to the effect that joy resided as of nature in the service of God; and the service of God for those times meant the definite renunciation of the world. It pointed to the fact that in joining themselves to the Order of the Friars Minor men would not be condemning themselves to a life of gloom and hatred, but leaving a life of superficial

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, xcvi.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 128; *Writings*, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, ii, 128; *Mirror*, xcvi.

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and evanescent pleasure for one which was instinct with joy because it was founded on love.

It is presumably because of the indissoluble connection between these two qualities that St. Francis recognized in joy a genuine protection against sin. It would not be so much for what it produced as for that which it implied as its basis: it was a quality that could only be produced by a certain interior disposition, and it was that disposition which he desired. His aim was for them to be filled with a spiritual joy which came from clearness of heart and devoutness of prayer; came, that is, from a heart in which there was no inclination to the separateness of self-hood, and from a continual remembrance of, and dedication to, the source of all high things. If they were so disposed joy would be in them, and if joy were in them the demons, as he phrased it, would be unable to harm them, for they would say, "since this servant of God has joy in tribulation as in prosperity, we can find no way of entering to him nor of hurting him." Thus their joy would be the livery of their free servitude, as sadness would be the mark of those in bondage to evil, and with joy and its foundations as an automatic defence against wrong the brethren would be the edification of their neighbours and the reproach of the enemy.<sup>1</sup>

St. Francis thus conceived the powers of darkness as realizing the protection which joy afforded the brethren, and as always trying to trouble it in them even if they could not do so in him. Melancholy opened the door to them, and it was in part the fear of this resulting from over-severity to their bodies which caused him to counsel his brethren to use some discretion in their austerities. Asceticism, as all other actions, had to be undertaken and sustained joyfully. The enthusiasm of their joy would

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, xcv.

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ensure their asceticism being strict, within the limits; but if it were not there he pictured the soul as finding no delight or even satisfaction within, and the flesh accordingly demanding its own and finally gaining authority over the soul which was starved for want of its own proper nourishment of love and joy.<sup>1</sup> His belief in its efficacy is summed up by Celano in words that will bear repetition. "When spiritual joy (he said) fills the heart, in vain does the Serpent shed his deadly poison. Devils cannot hurt Christ's servant when they see him filled with holy mirth."<sup>2</sup>

It was, finally, one of the purposes of St. Francis' prayer to restore spiritual joy when it had been lost or troubled. He went to the source of love and freedom to renew them in himself, and to draw therefrom the joy which was his supreme defence.<sup>3</sup> For prayer was to him a living well of consolation and inspiration: the means by which he actually communicated with the higher and wider life which surrounded him. If during it he were disturbed by any of the affairs or questions which were naturally brought to him as leader of a large and growing Order, he would return to it the moment he had disposed of them and take up again the interior attitude he had been compelled for a moment and in some measure to leave. His custom was to seek some place removed from his companions where he could pray without feeling that their eyes were upon him, and where he could give himself up without hindrance to the promptings of the spirit that moved him. If he became conscious, while in public, of the great ocean of divinity in which he was enfolded, and if the imperative necessity of devoting himself wholly to the whisperings of the spirit forced itself upon him, he used to hide his face with the sleeve of his habit so that nothing should distract his attention, or attract the notice of his

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 69, 128-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



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fellows. He would erect round him, that is, a real or imaginary enclosure within which he was free to give himself up to undisturbed devotion.

But just as prayer was not with him a formal thing, an obedient repetition of formulae, so it was not confined to any particular time or place. It continued, as has been well remarked, throughout all that he did; walking, working, or resting he retained that attitude of the soul turned towards God in adoration which is the foundation and the essence of prayer. Celano describes him in one of his graphic phrases as not so much praying as having become a living prayer, inasmuch as he concentrated his whole attention and affection on what he was seeking. There were times, it is natural and true, when he was more specifically conscious of the divine than at others—times of special devotion and concentration when he purposely withdrew from the external world and moved with a proportionately greater freedom in the world within. Such would be the times of his most vivid and full communion, and the times in particular when he would receive those ineffable consolations which are part of the mystic's heritage.<sup>1</sup>

The point of interest for the moment is his attitude towards such consolations and experiences.<sup>2</sup> In the early days of the Order, when St. Francis was troubled about its future and unable to see clearly what were the best steps to take to ensure its success, he one day gave himself up to fervent prayer. He was overcome with a sense of his own shortcomings in general and his incapacity, as he was, to

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 94, 95; Le Monnier, book ii, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> It has not been found possible to deal with St. Francis' mystical life—his life, that is, from the point of view of its definite interior stages—in the present book. His experiences will be considered, therefore, without special reference to the steps of spiritual advance for which they stood.

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direct the destinies of his companions in particular. As he prayed, with continual self-accusations and appeals for mercy, there gradually crept over him an indescribable and overpowering gladness—a flood of joy which swept away his doubts and hesitations, and filled him with a conviction of security. He was no longer oppressed by the weight of his sin, but passed, according to his biographer, into a region apart from himself wherein he was bathed and absorbed in light. Standing thus apart from the limitations of ordinary humanity he was open to intimations and impressions from which it is in general debarred, and saw clearly the future of the Order laid out like a map before him. When the vision faded and the light withdrew, he came out from the experience completely renewed in spirit, so that he seemed already changed into another man. If the implications of such an experience be considered, with all its treasure of unearthly joy and exhilaration, the feeling of freedom in being “ caught up above himself ” away from everyday restrictions and communing with the universal spirit of the world, it will be realized that for a very large proportion of men it would be inseparable from some sense of gratification. The natural impulse would be towards a feeling of satisfaction at having achieved so much, or at least at having been singled out as worthy of such a visitation: it is not beyond the bounds of probability that some almost instinctive inclination towards an attitude of superiority would shape itself in the mind which compared itself with others to whom such occurrences were unknown. There would be—who will deny it ?—a tendency to speak of it to others, casually, it may be, but as though it were a personal achievement as to which there was some ground for self-congratulation. It was precisely this that St. Francis avoided. It seems that he made no attempt to describe to the brethren his amazing experiences in so far as they were strictly personal, and was only con-

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strained to mention his vision of the future of the Order by the knowledge that in so doing he would give his companions an encouragement they sorely needed. He described how he had seen that the Order would be greatly increased, with brethren coming from all countries to join themselves to it, but before he spoke he said quite plainly that he mentioned even so much of his experience with great reluctance. "I am constrained also for your profit to tell you what I have seen; but far more gladly would I keep silence concerning it, did not charity constrain me to report it to you."<sup>1</sup>

Thus also after his final exaltation on Mount Alvernia, when he went out into the world with the Stigmata upon him, as the sealing of his complete serving of Christ, he was continually at pains to hide them not only from the general public, but from the brethren as well. It was with difficulty that he was persuaded to relate even the main points of his experience to his brethren, and there were some things in it—the words which were spoken by the figure on the Cross—which he would never recount.<sup>2</sup> He wore woollen socks to hide the wounds in his feet, and was unwilling to put out his hand for anyone to kiss lest the marks should be seen. He would rather hold out his fingers only, or sometimes cover it with his sleeve, and when Brother Pacifico induced him to give him both his hands to kiss so that another brother might see the wounds, St. Francis afterwards reproved him with "God pardon thee, brother, for thou givest me much distress sometimes." The curiosity of the brethren was not always kept in check by his evident wishes, for though when his tunic was being shaken out he would cover the wound in his side, Brother Rufino on one occasion put his hand inside the habit and let it slip down until he touched the scar. Such incidents

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, xiii, 4.

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always caused St. Francis great trouble, and there does not seem any reasonable doubt that he was afraid lest, by the adulation of the people, he might be led into glorifying himself for what he had received.<sup>1</sup>

The prospect of crowds flocking to see him and praise him with all the warm-hearted, if momentary, sincerity of Italy, on account of an incident which symbolized not some achievement of his own, but a great favour which he received, must have filled him with horror. And with his strangely unperverted frankness he could not have escaped the feeling that in allowing such honours to be paid to him as would result from a general knowledge of the Stigmata, he would be allowing the people to offer to him what was due only to God. It is in accordance with his whole character that this should stand for a real difficulty: even to allow honour to be deflected, and much more if he were the cause of such deflection, from God to himself would be to him a wrong of indescribable baseness. Further, he cannot but have realized that the wounds which he bore were not in themselves ultimate. They were the evidence of an interior experience, the seal which in his own heart he knew for a sign of the final and unbroken compact made between himself and the spirit of Christ in the blinding moments on Alvernia. To him they expressed continually the great fact that he had attained his ideal and been crucified with Christ in the manner in which it was possible, and had also in some sense risen with Him: they were not the fact itself, though by others they might be mistaken for it. They were important, in a word, like other mystical phenomena, for the inner experience for which they stood, and, dear though they were to him in his love for Christ's Passion, he would not have them taken otherwise.

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 95, 96; ii, 136-8; *Legend*, 69. Cf. *Little Flowers*, Of the Fourth Consideration of the Most Holy Stigmata.



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For the rest, St. Francis consistently taught the folly of publishing abroad the details of consolations received in prayer. He felt the beauty of silence in such things. To divulge them to others was in some way to dissipate them, as though by putting so subtle and precious a thing into the necessarily precise form of words it would lose something of its fineness, and as though by being bandied about it were belittled. He took the view also that by importing any personal pride into the matter the source of consolation would be automatically closed, since the reception of such consolation varied with the degree to which the personal element had been obliterated. "For the sake of a trifling reward," he summed it up, "one may lose a priceless thing, and may easily provoke the giver not to repeat his gift."<sup>1</sup> His habitual attitude was expressed in the words used by Isaiah, "My secret to me"; for that which passes between the soul and God is the soul's own, and efficacious only for her.<sup>2</sup>

So great was St. Francis' belief in the dire effects of boasting about such things that he put his warning in the form of one of the Admonitions which contain the pith of his verbal teaching. He was by way of composing beatitudes after the manner of those given in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as of applying those already in existence to the needs of his brethren's life, and on this occasion he made use of that form. "Blessed is the servant," he wrote, "who treasures up in heaven the good things which the Lord shows him and who does not wish to manifest them to men through the hope of reward, for the Most High will Himself manifest His works to whomsoever He may please. Blessed is the servant who keeps the secrets of the Lord in his heart."<sup>3</sup> And it is likely enough, as Celano suggests, that he had learned the truth

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 99; Bonaventure, x, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Admonition 28 (*Writings*, p. 19).



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of his advice by his own experience, and found in effect that it was an evil thing to impart all things to everybody. He knew, it is said, that it is impossible for anyone to be spiritual, the perfection of whose spiritual state is not greater than that which appears outwardly, and great though were the external evidences in the case of St. Francis, it is not difficult to believe that the source from which they sprang was greater still.<sup>1</sup>

With this dislike of treating divine visitations as a matter of common conversation, or of allowing them to be in however remote a way a cause of self-gratification, went a vivid realization of their high value. St. Francis stands out in some distinction to the large body of saints and mystics who regarded such experiences with distrust: he did not share their belief in the danger of them if they were taken in the proper spirit. It may be on the one hand that at his period the science of the spiritual life had not been brought to the pitch of perfection that it afterwards reached: the inner way had not then been analysed and tabulated in Christendom, and it is evident that the writings of the Church Fathers would be far from generally known. It has been the work of Mystical Theology to popularize to some extent, and to classify to a large extent, the experiences and the advice of mystics who were very largely posterior to St. Francis, and he was therefore neither subject to their recommendations nor privileged to profit by their experience. And on the other hand, the almost timid attitude of some of the later mystics was foreign to his nature. There is nothing to show that he, any more than they, ever allowed himself or his brethren to aim at divine visitations or definite mystical phenomena as things precious in themselves: such consolations were superadded to the main and the real purpose of life, and not to be

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 96.

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mistaken for that purpose itself. But this did not mean to St. Francis that they should be mistrusted. With the absolute simplicity of his essentially childlike nature he was more apt to receive them with a genuine delight and a very sincere gratitude. He recognized both by their essential quality and their effect that they were, in his own language, from God, and he was ready to receive whatever should come from such a source with open arms. It was his very simplicity which prevented him from seeking such consolations as definite ends, or to satisfy a personal curiosity, and it was his simplicity also that moved him to be grateful when they were given. From what is reported of him he appears as having regarded it as a discourtesy to the giver to pass negligently over any of his gifts, and as having rather followed them up and enjoyed the delight of them as long as they were granted.<sup>1</sup>

This enjoyment, however, as would be expected from what has been said above, was, so to speak, private. As he would cover his face with the sleeve of his habit if a state of prayer came on him in the presence of the brethren, so he would try always to appear as if nothing had happened after his private devotions. It is probably impossible for the inexperienced mind to conceive the sweetness of those devotions, or the ineffable relation which was established between St. Francis and his God: it is sufficient to know that he came out from them almost changed into another man, and that he did his best to seem like the other people with whom he mixed. For as his strongest and most persistent conviction was that the glory of spiritual consolation was to God, so he regarded it, in common with all else, as a fit subject of offering, and he would instruct his brethren to return it to the God from Whom it came in untainted purity. To attach themselves to it, by desire or egotism,

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 95 ; Bonaventure, x, 2,

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was to rob the treasure of God. Concurrently with this went the feeling of his own unworthiness to receive such favours. Looking at himself and realizing the measure in which he fell short of perfection, he was overcome by his unfitness to be made a partaker of the divine mysteries, and the consolations and benedictions he received were a source of sincere and undisguised amazement to him. "Had the Most High shewn such favours unto a robber," he was wont to say to himself, "he would have been better pleasing than thou, Francis," and to a brother who had had a vision of him glorified in the company of the saints he said: "If any man, howsoever guilty, had received such mercy from Christ as I, I verily think he would have been far more acceptable unto God than I."<sup>1</sup> He considered, accordingly, that it befitted him better to defer the reception of the gifts of God to a later stage when they would be more consonant with his condition, and he would therefore pray: "Lord, take from me Thy good in this world, that Thou mayst keep it for me hereafter." And he instructed his brethren, epitomizing his whole position, that when they had received some new grace in prayer, they should say before coming out into the world again: "O Lord, Thou hast sent this consolation and sweetness from heaven to me, an unworthy sinner, and I restore it to Thee that Thou mayst keep it for me, for that I am a robber of Thy treasure."<sup>2</sup>

Thus did St. Francis in his own case avoid being puffed up by his experiences, and aid his companions to do the same both by precept and example. But it was not only in respect of divine visitations that he avoided pride: he taught that the more good a man did the greater must be his abasement in his own eyes.<sup>3</sup> The same attitude is

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, vi, 3, 6; Celano, ii, 123, 133.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 99; Bonaventure, x, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Admonition 12 (*Writings*, p. 13).

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shown in one of the additions to the Primitive Rule that was concerned with the brothers' preaching. He besought them in the charity which God is, that they should one and all make every effort to avoid glorying or rejoicing or inwardly exalting themselves on account of any good words or works, or in effect for any good, which God might from time to time say or do by them, and he recommended to them the saying of Christ: "Rejoice not in this, that spirits are subject unto you."<sup>1</sup> With this teaching may be compared an incident in his own life which is contained in one of the later accounts. A man who is described as a very perverse leper complained bitterly of the attempts of the brethren to help him, on the ground that they did not fulfil their office properly. St. Francis therefore offered his own services, and after being nursed by him with infinite care the leper was cured. Whereat St. Francis went away at once to another part of the country, because he felt that by staying in the neighbourhood some of the glory of the cure might attach to him; whereas he was conscious in his own mind that the honour was due to God, and anxious that it should be attributed to Him alone.<sup>2</sup>

So did St. Francis labour to be faithful to the promptings of the spirit of all love which does not, and cannot by its very nature, vaunt itself. His method was to practise voluntarily what he desired should become part of his nature and was typical of that which was always his aim, and in the end it is not difficult to understand that love became literally a second nature and that he lived in accordance with its dictates. He aimed at stamping out pride in every aspect of his life, and succeeded even in that most difficult, because most subtle, region of spiritual experience.

<sup>1</sup> First Rule, chap. xvii (*Writings*, p. 50).

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers*, xxv.



## Chapter Thirteen

**S**INCE IT IS PART OF THE ESSENTIAL love that it seeks no reward, of any kind, from any source, there must arrive at some moment in the mystic's progress a point at which he will not merely disregard the possibility of a return from man (even as the agent of God), but will be disinterested also in a more fundamental sense. Though in action God is loved in man and man in God, a more direct, if a more abstract, conception must enter into the mind. There is a view straight from the individual to God as the Being finally loved and as the ultimate Giver from whom all gifts come, but from whom they are not asked. He is loved in transcendence as well as in immanence, and the mystic's love for Him must be in both cases of one character as regards any desire for a reward.

To attain to such disinterestedness is evidently one of the hardest tasks the mystic can set himself. There must be no question of supporting present hardships in the hope of a future prize in the way of peace; no question of an immediate sacrifice in the expectation of an ultimate exaltation. The hardship has to be borne and the sacrifice made in a spirit of perfect love for the God who is conceived by him as finally their source, and in the unshaken conviction that they constitute a necessary cleansing to which he would not have been subjected if his condition had not demanded it. Though the fact that the result of sacrifice is peace may be present to his consciousness, it must not be made the subject of any calculation when the opportunity



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of sacrifice is given. "It becomes a fact of *experience* to those who truly live," it has been said, "that not only must we give up *all* in order to obtain all, but that we must do so before we attain to any assurance that such will be our reward. Where, otherwise, would be the sacrifice?" And again, to the same effect: "Reject the foul smoke, and it will be forced back on you as pure flame. But this you cannot believe, until you have rejected it without thought of reward."<sup>1</sup> In so far as the mystic succeeds in doing this he escapes the accusation of being a spiritual Epicurean, because the ultimate pleasure is not taken into consideration, and it is only in so far as he does it that he can be regarded as a true and sincere mystic.

All else but this is a form of egotism. It may be veiled under many appearances of sanctity, but however ingenious the disguise it is possessed of an inherent subtlety which enables it to creep in where it is least suspected. Any position is tainted with it which permits, in however remote or unconscious a manner, the idea of a spiritual profit and loss account, wherein the trials of this life are balanced by the gains of the next so that the present existence is ruled according to the method which shows the largest profit in a future one. And this remains true in spite of the frankly mercenary tone of a great deal of Christian writing that is more or less strongly tinged with mysticism. It is true of all forms of life, whether they be active or contemplative or a compound of both.

It is to the contemplative life that belongs more especially the whole series of mystical phenomena. The reasons for not desiring them have already been considered: they are regarded as dangerous because they are peculiarly open to delusion and because their reception may incline to an inflation of self-hood. But more fundamentally than this

<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, "The Rod, the Root, and the Flower" (*Aurea Dicta*, lxxv and xv).

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they are not to be desired because to do so is to look for a reward, and the love which should be the motive does not seek its own. The one necessary thing, according to St. Teresa, is that the personal will should be renounced and the will of God followed in all things: if this be accomplished, union with God is reached, and any other more wonderful form of union (including such supernatural gifts as the suspension of the powers of the soul) is unnecessary. Its chief value, in fact, if reached, lies in the resignation of the will it implies, and St. Teresa adds that there are many other ways for a soul to arrive at the Mansion of which she is speaking than by the short cut of supernatural suspension of the faculties.<sup>1</sup> On reading her writings it may appear that St. Teresa is not quite irreproachable in her attitude towards possible recompenses, and there are passages in which she agrees without protest with the ecclesiastical tendency to set up a scheme of spiritual rewards as a lure to the multitude. But in others—and in them she seems to be speaking more surely with her own voice—she makes up for all her shortcomings in this respect. She pours all her scorn on those who “sue God for His own money,” and says with admirable finality that she is sure that those who imagine that they deserve any kind of spiritual consolation because they have given themselves to prayer for many years, will never attain to spiritual perfection.<sup>2</sup> The worshipper may not think that, since he has given so much time to reflection and meditation on the splendour of God, he has therefore any right to demand in natural justice that some gleam of the light of that splendour shall in return shine out on him. St. Teresa's prayer was that so inestimable a gift as the love of God should not be given to any who served Him simply because of the sweetness they found in so doing, and she

<sup>1</sup> *The Interior Castle*, Fifth Mansion, chap. iii, 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, chap. xxxix, 21.

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proceeds with counsel for those who are beginning to use the way of mental prayer. If they are doing so with resolution, and are determined not to care much, either as a matter for exaltation or depression, whether sweetness be met with therein or not, they have already accomplished a large part of the journey.<sup>1</sup> St. John of the Cross gives a similar warning in a section devoted to "Imperfections in respect of Spiritual Gluttony." He is speaking of the beginners who find relish in spiritual exercises, and says that many of them, being spoilt by such relish, aim at gratifying the spiritual palate rather than at acquiring true purity and devotion, which is that which is looked for and accepted by God during the entire spiritual journey. He regards the deprivation of such delights as necessary for their safety, for in spite of extremities of penance and mortification, such people are following their own will only.<sup>2</sup>

Molinos speaks in the same strain. There are many, he says, who seek God without finding Him because they are impelled more by curiosity than by a pure intention: "they rather desire spiritual comforts than God Himself," with the result that they find neither. Detachment must be complete, not only from temporal things but from the very gifts of the Holy Spirit, from the desire for supernatural, as for natural, goods. He explains that many souls fail to attain to the Divine Wisdom in spite of the fact that they spend many hours in prayer and receive the Sacrament daily, simply because they have not been able to rid themselves of attachment in one form or another: yet it is only when this is done that the soul is clothed in that Nothingness wherein God is all in all to the soul. To attach oneself to the gifts of the Spirit is to "come out from the centre of Nothingness, and thus the whole Work is spoiled."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, chap. xi, 19-20. Cf. chap. xv, 18.

<sup>2</sup> *The Dark Night of the Soul*, pp. 55 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, book iii, chap. xviii, xix, xx.

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Scaramelli, basing himself on the general testimony of the mystics, is for ever insisting on the need for purity of intention and the folly of becoming attached to consolations received in prayer, and he regards one of the great results of the sensible purgation as being the fact that it impels the soul to seek not its own will but that of God, and to do good, not for the delight that is to be extracted from it, but from pure love of the good.<sup>1</sup> He warns spiritual directors not to hold out the prospect of consolations to any of their penitents who may be undergoing this purgation, because they should not suffer in the hope of spiritual favours but simply support their difficulties for the sake of God, without expectation of reward in the present life.<sup>2</sup> The *Theologia Germanica* is no less emphatic. Speaking of those who "are enlightened with the true light," the author says that "they are in a state of freedom, because they have lost the fear of pain or hell, and the hope of reward or heaven, but are living in pure submission to the Eternal Goodness, in the perfect freedom of perfect love." And again, "It is indeed true, that it is good for a man that he should desire, or come by his own good. But this cannot come to pass so long as a man is seeking, or purposing his own good; for if he is to find and come by his own highest good, he must lose it that he may find it."<sup>3</sup> Thus the life of contemplation

<sup>1</sup> *Il Direttore Mistico*, V, v, 46. Cf. II, vi, 65, and I, ii, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, V, xi, 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. x and chap. xl. See also chap. xxxiv: "For a man's highest good would be and truly is, that he should not seek himself nor his own things, nor be his own end in any respect, either in things spiritual or things natural, but should seek only the praise and glory of God and His holy will"; chap. xxxviii: (of the Christ life) "This life is not chosen in order to serve any end, or to get anything by it, but for love of its nobleness, and because God loveth and esteemeth it so greatly"; and chap. xlv: "So long as a man seeketh his own will and his own highest Good, because it is *his*, and for his own sake, he will never find it; for so long as he doeth this, he is not seeking his own highest Good, and how then should he find it?"



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which is aimed at obtaining the ineffable delights of communion with God, for the sake of those delights and not for the sake of God, is foredoomed to failure.

But the contemplative is not the only method of life to which this principle applies. The life of activity, or that which is in part active and in part contemplative, has also to be directed on similar lines by the mystic for whom all other desires fade before his overpowering desire for God. The thousand and one details of annihilation which, when it is dedicated to this one end, comprise such a life, must all be embraced without thought of recompense at any time or in any manner. Poverty is not followed by striking a bargain according to the terms of which the present penury, however willingly accepted, is balanced against the promise of future wealth, for its essential spirit of detachment would be nullified by such a conception. Obedience is not a temporary diplomatic arrangement by virtue of which the power of unlimited command will be eventually gained, for that which in the last analysis obeys has, in the end, to be utterly suppressed. Chastity and all the scale of self-control are not aimed at freedom for the sake of the ease and lightness it brings with it, but at enabling God to be manifested more fully when the indrawing desires of the lower self are done away with. To forgo some satisfaction is not therefore for the mystic a method by which, according to a perverse psychological reaction, that which is forgone will return on him increased by his disdain for it: there can be no ulterior idea of attraction by contempt if his attitude be sincere. Nor will his sacrifices be converted

For so long as he doeth this, he seeketh himself . . . But whosoever seeketh, loveth, and pursueth Goodness as Goodness and for the sake of Goodness, and maketh that his end, for nothing but the love of Goodness, not for love of the I, Me, Mine, self, and the like, he will find the highest Good, for he seeketh it aright, and they who seek it otherwise do err."



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into a species of barter, by any obscure casuistry of the reason: virtue will not even be its own reward for him, if that reward connote any idea of self-satisfaction in feeling that he has been virtuous, for that of all positions is most diametrically opposed to his ideal of self-abasement. The reward of virtue will be, in fact, the glory that accrues to God thereby: that, and no more and no less, will be his purpose and his satisfaction.

On his own hypothesis there will remain to him one all-embracing desire when all the rest have been consecutively suppressed as sources of action. His desire for God will not decrease with his other desires, but increase, it may well be, in direct proportion to their suppression: can it then be maintained that his attempt to replace the personal by the universal will is in any sense complete or sincere? The answer is that his desire for God must cease to be a personal desire before it can be satisfied. For it to be personal it would, of necessity, seek a recompense for its sacrifices—the body would seek payment even for its tears, as St. Francis expressed it—but in so far as it does not seek such a return, it may be taken to stand for something other than a remote and bizarre manifestation of self-seeking. It is quite clear that the personal will, as being the expression of the desires of the lower self, cannot make of its own accord for a state in which it will no longer have a separate existence. Man's desire for God, that is, must be God-given—it is the heritage of the spirit seeking again its source. To the extent to which he gives ear to its calling and obedience to its instigations, the mystic will pass into its knowledge, and to the knowledge of God. His part is permissive towards the spirit, but unremittingly active in opposition to the lower self, and the spirit can only become actual to him as the lower self becomes increasingly unreal and powerless. To suggest, therefore, that his motives are those of an exalted type of self-seeking is to

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misunderstand the foundation of his position; his desire for God is the desire of like calling to like and his own identification of himself with that call by striking out all of himself that opposes it; it is not the finite trying to embrace infinity, but a breaking down of the boundaries by which its finiteness is constituted so that the infinite may flow in and possess it.

It is for this reason that the search for a reward is so fatal. It rests on the supposition that man can possess God, whereas in effect the highest thing is that man may be possessed by God. And it may be asked in passing whether the instinctive and occasionally passionate insistence on the continuance of personal identity indefinitely, even when the far unity with God has been achieved, be not traceable to a highly subtilized and deeply rooted egotism. Union is the meeting of two separated things which continue in some sense apart and personal—but unity? If God be in fact all in all, where is the room for the separate personality that is the dearest possession of thousands? The position seems to approach dangerously near that in which the chief idea is the enjoyment of God, forgetting that while such enjoyment is possible the man is still apart from That with which it is the end of his existence to be one.

But to confine this unmercenary attitude to this life alone is obviously impossible. Merely to defer the reward to a future existence would be to attempt to make good a childish deception. It would be equivalent to declaring a thing non-existent because it is invisible, and instead of destroying the acquisitive and egotistical tendency of the lower self, would increase it beyond all bounds under a veil of present disinterestedness. The intensity with which the future reward is insisted on will, in most cases, increase with the distance of it: as it recedes into the mists of the future, it will be clung to as the ultimate compensation after the immediate tyranny is overpast, as the one desper-

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ate hope of justice. The I which desires it will be as much, if not more, tainted with self-centredness than the I which seeks to-morrow the reward for its virtue of to-day, and the fact that the reward is spiritual will not decrease but increase the degree of egotism. For it cannot be maintained that to exchange a temporal benefit for the kingdom of heaven is a conspicuous example of humility: it is perhaps more than anything a matter of comparative values rather than of pure love.

But the sublimity of such a view of complete disinterestedness has unfitted it for general use. The Churches have realized that if they were to offer it commonly to their members as the final truth it would appeal to next to none and dismay myriads. They have therefore preferred to make just this deferment of the final recompense, while insisting with the necessary emphasis on the fact that temporal compensations are not to be taken into consideration when any question is being weighed. The joys of Paradise are their lure: they may be for their members a sufficient reason for sacrifice. And in deferring their reward the Churches would produce in them a preparatory annihilation of the lower self which would fit them for all but the last great renunciation—the denial of the claims of the self that has denied all lesser claims. They would be purified of all other self-centred desires, and might be conceived as ready to learn the necessity for that also. But with the negative teaching of many Churches as to the possibility of progress after death there is no place for speculation as to this last renunciation being made by those who have not made it a part of realization in the present life.

Yet in spite of this there are traces in mystical literature of a disinterestedness which extends beyond the grave. Some have cried out with Job in the extremity of his anguish: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,"

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and have contemplated with unaltered love a death which was not the gate of life. Angela of Foligno had a vision on one occasion in which she saw herself finally damned, and explained afterwards, when the vision had passed, that she was in no way disturbed by the thought of her damnation, but concerned only with the horror of having done anything displeasing to God.<sup>1</sup> She was not concerned, that is, with even the ultimate reward: she made no claim other than to continue in her love. A similar point of view is to be found in a story told of himself by Tauler, though as it is given the attitude is not attributed to him. He had prayed for many years to meet someone who should teach him the essence of the spiritual life, and finally heard a voice directing him to go to a certain church where he would find the director he was seeking. When he got to the church he found a remarkably ragged beggar sitting by the door, to whom he bade "Good-day." The beggar answered that he did not remember ever having had a bad one, or, further, ever having been unhappy, and explained that he had accepted whatever fortune had been sent to him not only with resignation, but by praising and glorifying God for it. He had schooled himself to will what God willed without reserve, and he took whatever came with gladness. On hearing this, Tauler asked him what he would say if he should be damned, and received the answer that if such should be the will of God he would "embrace our Lord with humility and with love," and cling so closely to Him that he would draw Him even into hell with him. Hell with Him was a greater thing than heaven without Him: he cared nothing for suffering if his love were fulfilled.<sup>2</sup> It is such cases as these that show at any rate the possibility of a disinterested love, however rare be its

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Scaramelli, *op. cit.*, V, xvii, 173.

<sup>2</sup> See St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Conformity with the Will of God*, edition of 1844, pp. 14, 15.



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profession or those who are capable even of understanding its possibility.

The question of Pure Love is one that disturbed the harmony of the Church to a surprising extent at the end of the seventeenth century. In his incomparable work on mysticism Baron von Hügel has traced the conception from the beginnings of Christianity up till the end of that discussion, with a wealth of learning and considerable lucidity of exposition. The Jewish tendency to construct a detailed scale of rewards seems to have been taken over unchanged in the teaching of the Gospels, on the principle that the labourer is worthy of his hire, and that it is better to lay up treasures in heaven than upon earth; and yet gradually the reward assumes such an aspect of disproportion when compared with the effort that it can no longer be considered as dependent on it. Thus, as in the parable of the labourers who were paid the same price irrespective of the amount of their work, it is the freedom of giving the reward which is insisted upon: the divine recompense operating on standards different from those of the world. The labourers were rebuked because they thought they deserved more: they were given what it was good that they should be given. With St. Paul this took the form of "grace." Side by side with the traditional Jewish teaching of man being rewarded according to his acts is the new conception of work done irrespective of reward—the pure and untrammelled love of which St. Paul chanted the splendour as no one has done before or since.

Later, in the controversy which was spoken of, the main disputants were Fénelon and Bossuet, around whom the theological world was divided into two camps of which the side that was concerned to deny the possibility of acts of Pure Love does not appear to have manifested any aspect or degree of love whatever in the discussion. The point which Fénelon succeeded in carrying, despite the original



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condemnation of his *Explication des Maximes des Saints sur la Vie Intérieure*, was that acts of Pure Love were possible and commendable. The condemnation of his book was in part due to a lack of clearness in his method of presenting his position, and in part because his teaching of the possibility of a state of Pure Love brought him dangerously into touch with the teachings of the Quietists. As to the first point he elucidated his meaning in a series of writings extending over some fifteen years, which were finally accepted as orthodox in spite of the efforts of his opponents to secure their condemnation. The belief in the possibility of acts of Pure Love is supported by the opinions of St. Thomas Aquinas, who quite clearly states that there are two loves, a perfect and an imperfect. The former is that with which a man, and *a fortiori* God, is loved for his own sake: the latter that with which he is loved in order that some good may accrue to the lover. The former alone is love in its strict sense: "God alone is man's ultimate end, and beatitude is only . . . an end in immediate proximity to the ultimate end." But beyond merely allowing the existence of Pure Love, St. Thomas agrees that acts of it may be done in this life, and they will increase as the soul advances in perfection. They may, however, be not solely acts in which Pure Love alone is exercised: beside these there may be acts which are informed by Pure Love, but bear also the characteristics of other acts. Pure Love is thus conceived as being able to be either the sole or the partial motive, but in any case to be that part of the act which is supremely meritorious.

As to the second point, it is not necessary for the present purpose to consider closely the connection between Quietism and the state of Pure Love. It is admitted that the early Fathers considered such a state possible. Clement of Alexandria divided the faithful into Mercenaries and Friends or Children; St. Basil and St. Gregory into the

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three classes of Slaves, Mercenaries, and Friends or Children, of whom St. Basil said that the first class obeyed God through fear of punishment, the second through hope of recompense, and the third from sheer love. There is no doubt at all that these Fathers were not referring to single acts but to whole states of Pure Love. But it is said that the Church wisely ordained that these three classes should not be regarded as distinguished so sharply as to compel any person to seem to belong exclusively to any one of them: at the most, any one of the three states was to represent only the predominant and not the sole type of act constituting the soul's state. For it is maintained that it is impossible for there to be a condition of soul composed solely of acts of Pure Love, and it is in this connection that the relation with Quietism is dangerously apparent. The accusation brought against the Quietists was that they taught the possibility of an act once performed continuing unbroken through life,<sup>1</sup> and the conception of a state of Pure Love suggested, if it were not equivalent to, this doctrine of the One Act. But the state of Pure Love is not discarded because it involves any type of Quietism, but because, in spite of its recognition as a high and holy state, it is not attainable in this life.<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic fear is apparently that by permitting such a state of perfection to be conceived as possible for humanity, it may allow that humanity to get very distinctly out of hand. It might become convinced that even venial sins were impossible for it, that the state was continuous and unbroken, and that being untainted by any motive other than the highest it was beyond correction or reproof. The

<sup>1</sup> Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*, book i, chaps. xiii, xiv.

<sup>2</sup> See Baron von Hügel, *The Mystical Element in Religion*, vol. ii, pp. 152-81, of part of which the above pages are to a large extent a condensation, for an admirable discussion of the whole question and of some related problems.

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author who has been quoted is apprehensive that a state of Pure Love, if possible as the early Fathers conceived it to be, "would involve the neglect of numberless other virtues and duties," and he fears the fanaticism of thinking that it could be attained before death.<sup>1</sup> But whether in fact it have ever been fully attained or not, whether certain of the saints at the supreme periods of their lives have or have not reached it, it does not seem impossible at any rate to conceive of a state wherein the love for God is so continuous and so strong that it is the one and only motive for all actions. Granted that self-seeking and self-interest of any kind have been finally rooted out at a certain stage upon the journey, it would seem that the love of God for His own sake might well so fill the whole conscious life as to leave no room for any other consideration. It is, further, not only that the motive would be Pure Love, but that all acts of no matter what kind would be done *as* acts of Pure Love. To the onlooker they might well appear to be compounded of other and lesser elements: to the doer they would be elevated into a sphere wherein the love of God was the only thing existent, and the "numberless other virtues and duties" would become part of it. They would be done for love because love was the only thing left in life—the beginning and the meaning and the end of everything. Is any other conclusion possible if the assertions of the mystics themselves be accepted, that at a certain time their will was one with the will of God? The Unitive state is nothing other than this—the Perfect Union, as St. Teresa has said, is complete conformity with the will of God<sup>2</sup>—and, on the

<sup>1</sup> See Baron von Hügel, *The Mystical Element in Religion*, vol. ii, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 268. The view is, of course, common to practically all the mystics, but it may be interesting to instance a statement made by St. John of the Cross: "When I speak of the union of the soul with God I . . . mean . . . that union and transformation of the soul in God by love which is only then accomplished when there subsists the

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assumption of the mystics, that will is the very essence of Pure Love. How, then, at such a time can the state be anything except a state of Pure Love? The words of Julian of Norwich can receive no other interpretation: if the human and divine parts of man are conceived as being "oned in bliss"<sup>1</sup> such oneing must represent an actual fact or else be discarded as a pious fancy altogether, and if it represent a fact, it must be a fact of Pure Love.

And if such a state be attainable it is surely immaterial whether it continue unbroken for always as it would in the Spiritual Marriage. Short of that it may end for a thousand and one reasons—by any of the means by which a thought other than of love was allowed to enter the consciousness and become identified with the will—but if it be possible it must remain as an ideal towards which the mystic will strive. It will not be a One-Act state, but a state of repeated acts in one unvarying direction—a variety of figures, as it were, fashioned in the one divine medium. It is obviously applicable to the rewards of a future life as to those of the present one, and the author of a commentary on St. Thomas sums up the position beyond dispute. "We may not," he says, "love God in view of reward in suchwise as to make eternal life the true and ultimate end of our love, or to love God because of it, so that without reward we would not love Him. . . . We must love God with reference to the eternal reward in suchwise that we put forth indeed both love and good works in view of such beatitude—in so far as the latter is the end proposed to those works by God Himself; yet that we subordinate

likeness which love begets." It "takes effect when two wills, the will of God and the will of the soul, are conformed together, neither desiring aught repugnant to the other. Thus the soul, when it shall have driven away from itself all that is contrary to the divine will, becomes transformed in God by love" (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, book ii, chap. v, sec. 3).

<sup>1</sup> *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xix.



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this our beatitude to the love of God as the true and ultimate end," so that, "if we had no beatitude to expect at all, we should nevertheless still love Him and execute good works for His sake alone. In this manner we shall first love God above all things and for His own sake; and we shall next keep the eternal reward before us, for the sake of God and of His honour."<sup>1</sup> The end of this quotation leaves no doubt that even eternal salvation is only to be willed because presumably God wills it—it is to be desired neither for its own sake nor for the sake of man, but for the sake of God and His honour. And inasmuch as it is dependent on the overcoming of the lower self, it results from and is in accordance with the desire of the spirit as distinct therefrom.

It is only to the nature that is to a great extent heroic that such acts and such a state will appear and persist as ideals, but heroism is a condition of sanctity and the conception appeals naturally to those whose mysticism is a pure and living force. Such natures are not, perhaps, common, for they presuppose a breadth of character, a generosity, almost a quixotism, which are the fruit of much experience and a high dedication, but their occasional existence is, fortunately for humanity, beyond doubt. It is they who will echo the words of St. John of the Cross that "an instant of pure love is more precious to God and the soul, and more profitable to the Church than all other good works together, though it may seem as if nothing were done,"<sup>2</sup> because in such an instant they have given rein to the highest part of their natures, and been active therein and therewith without admixture of the lower. To others

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Baron von Hügel, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 167. The commentary is by Sylvius.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Coventry Patmore, *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower* (*Aurea Diſta*, xxxi). Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, book ii, chap. xxii, sec. 18.



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the ideal must seem for ever impossible—at most the faint dream of an unpractical mysticism, at least an unattractive parody of human emotions. It is, perhaps, hardly to be expected that it will appeal to the typically Protestant mind or to any age or country to which, for the most part, the spirit of commercialism is second nature, but though as an ideal it may suffer eclipse, it can never be extinguished. Fénelon's great statement of the extreme position that "it is only pure love that loves to suffer" has been stigmatized of recent years as fundamentally Stoical or Buddhistic with an emotional turn added to it, and the whole doctrine of Pure Love has been said to "demand from us an impossible degree of detachment and renunciation."<sup>1</sup> On the supposition that it is a question of human love (which by its nature demands something in return for all it gives) this is evident enough, but if the love of which Fénelon and his co-thinkers spoke were indeed the love that does not seek its own, it would appear that what, to some, now appears an impracticable ideal is in reality not only possible, but finally necessary of attainment.

But though the mystic's life be not aimed at mystical experience as in any sense a reward, such experience is the result of his contemplation or his self-suppression, whether it come in the form of such phenomena as ecstasies, visions, and locutions, or in the more subtle form of a widening of the consciousness from which all such phenomena are absent. And as no experience is an isolated event, but brings in its train a definite alteration in the person who undergoes it, whether it be so marked as to be self-evident or so subtle as to appear non-existent, so the transcendent experience of the mystic may be expected to work some real change in him. If it be in reality so tremendous as is reported, it may be expected that the alteration which is its

<sup>1</sup> W. R. Inge, D.D., *Christian Mysticism*, Lecture VI, pp. 241, 242, of the second edition.

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result will be evident on a little consideration, and that the nature of that alteration should be susceptible of statement. Further, as the changes of which man's consciousness is capable are continuous, so that he is never the same to-day as he was yesterday, and as they are unlimited in variety and direction, it is desirable to arrive at some criterion by which those that result from genuine mystical experience may be judged.

In the first place as to the result. If that which is, by the hypothesis, the nature of the experience be borne in mind, its effect will not be far to seek. The experience results from the consciousness having been purged of the tendencies which have been called lower, in that they are personal and indrawn, and being filled with the opposite tendencies that are essentially outflowing. The desire to replace the former by the latter cannot come from the lower part, as it would be a move towards self-destruction: it emanates from the spiritual part and is an instigation to the soul to return from its exile. The experience consists in the entry of the spirit into the consciousness, in a greater or less degree according to the perfection with which the preparation has been made. The conclusions of mystical theology go to show that such an entry is far from always permanent: it may persist for a short time and then fade; it may come only as a flash, yet illuminate the whole universe as it does so; it may vary in acuteness and vividness from being equivalent to a mere glimmer to being equivalent to the full light of the sun; or finally, it may become so part of the consciousness as never to be entirely absent from it. In this last case, which is the Spiritual Marriage, it is always possible to enter into the full consciousness of the spirit by withdrawing all attention from other objects, and it is this permanence of consciousness which is the distinguishing mark of the state.

Now, again by the hypothesis, the outstanding char-

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acteristics of the spirit are two, which two are nevertheless but aspects of each other. The spirit is conceived as being universal, in the sense that nothing is outside of it: by its very nature it is all-comprehensive. Its antithesis is division. It is not arrived at by adding unit to unit, but by penetrating to a plane where separateness is impossible, and there is therefore nothing to remain outside, because spirit is all. Secondly, and as an aspect of this universality, the spirit is essentially love—love as an outgoing force which is all-embracing: again there is nothing to stand outside it on its own plane, because it is all, and its direction is out towards, and not in from, all that is outside its plane. In neither case is there in it any idea of self. Spiritual love and universality are therefore practically interchangeable terms—the love of the spirit is universal, and the universality of the spirit is founded on love. The mystical experience itself being the entry of the spirit into the consciousness for a longer or shorter period, and with greater or less fullness, the result of it will be the participation by the consciousness in these its characteristics.

The manner in which this participation will work out in the life of the mystic is fairly evident in its main lines. Speaking generally, it will bring with it a considerable increase in the force which he can apply to the spiritual or mystical work. It will mean an accretion of strength, an additional vitality, a wider comprehension; and all this because that which has come to him has been a force of love. For the foundation of his work is love, and the whole structure of it is love: as it is to the extent to which he has allowed it to enter into and direct his life that he has been opened up to the inflowing of the spirit, so does the inflowing of the spirit bring with it an immeasurable increase of love. The process is, in a sense, in a circle, only that which comes in is indefinitely greater than that which made the preparation, though they are both love. The one increases

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the other, and that again opens up the way to the first, till in the end there is nothing else in the consciousness but love. But that is a state above present comprehension, for the love is not the small and tainted emotion of humanity, but incomparably strong and incomparably pure.

It is easily conceivable that the influx of this power into a life will affect it in all its details. The fact that it brings with it an enormously increased vitality might seem in some way to lay open the recipient to a certain danger, in that vitality of itself brings no assurance that it will work for the universal, rather than for the personal—for God, rather than the self. But if indeed this be a danger, it is very greatly lessened by the fact that the influx will increase only in proportion as the self-seeking tendencies diminish. It is to the mystic who has practically abolished them that the increased force will come in anything approaching its fulness, though it may come to him then in a measure that would be the ruin of one whose dedication was less secure. The supreme sinner as he is generally accepted is admittedly an individual of tremendous force, but it may be questioned whether he ever reach the degree of power of the saint whose source is spiritual, and also whether he be not a great deal nearer sanctity than he is generally given credit for being. But with his dedication the mystic or the saint can receive the vitality not only unharmed, but with his effectiveness immensely increased. It will not only manifest in the fervour of his love for God in the moments of his prayer; it will not only send him back to contemplation with an overpowering passion of adoration; but, since there is no love for God apart from a love for the God in man, it will show also in his exterior actions and his relations with the world. The love which pulsates within him will urge him to strive for universality in all his activities as inevitably as a river runs to the sea, and he will be, according to the depth of his experience, instinct with love



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in its fulness. There can be for him no fear, no hanging back, for he is utterly secure in the knowledge—the knowledge of experience—that God works in him. It is not then surprising that he will face the most appalling situation with amazing calmness, that he will hurl himself into the thick of no matter what combat, that he will neither tremble nor turn before the most stupendous risks. He can be no longer impelled or hindered by the considerations which hold good for humanity at large, for with the experience of the spirit life, has undergone a revaluation. Having touched Reality, illusion has no longer any power.

The result of the experience will be, then, to increase the mystic's strength for the work of his life, and it is this which will distinguish it from the psychic disturbances and products with which it might be confounded if it came by way of phenomena. It will be remembered that these do not produce or necessarily evidence sanctity, though they may sometimes accompany it. And again, as love increases, so will increase the energy of the struggle to annihilate the lower self. This, in all its ramifications, is the groundwork of the mystic, because on it depends the reception of that other power, the knowledge of that other self, which brings all his effectiveness into action. And that effectiveness he knows, in the last analysis, to be God's.

In examining the result of mystical experience the criterion has been found by which the changes which result from it may be judged. The result *is* the criterion—there is no other ground on which to decide whether or not they may be regarded as having been caused by a genuine mystical experience. If the result be that increase of vitality in the direction of universality that has been spoken of, founded and shaped in love, ever impelling the mystic to greater efforts at self-conquest, there is little doubt that there has been a real contact with the spiritual part. Failing this in one form or another the experience can scarcely be



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counted as an entrance of the spirit into the consciousness, however amazing it may be or however astonishing its results.

It has been suggested above that his experience will do much to increase the mystic's effectiveness not only as between him and God, but also as between him and the world of exterior activity. But it would seem necessary to go a step farther than this. As a result of his identification, partial or complete, momentary or permanent, with the spirit, a power enters not merely into what he does and says, but also into what he is. The degree in which this occurs will vary, obviously, with the depth of his experience and the intimacy with which his relation with the spiritual part has been established. It is not to be expected that a flash of spiritual sight will effect so much as a longer period, or that a dim and surface realization will bring with it so much of lasting force as one that is more profound. The increase of such realization is the essence of spiritual progress: the passing experience will give way to one of longer duration as the way to it is opened by an increase of spiritual love and desire, and the realization will be progressively deepened. The final condition, it has been seen, is one where there is never any complete break between man and God, but the consciousness of His presence persists throughout, and in spite of, external activity, and can be brought to its fulness again by putting such activity aside. It is then of this last state that what follows will be pre-eminently true: at all points less than this there will be a comparative falling short.

To call the change an increase in the power of the mystic's personality is perhaps the nearest approach to a definition possible, but it is finally unsatisfactory because it suggests the idea that it is the man himself, as he is known ordinarily, to whom the accretion comes. The fact evidently is, on the contrary, that there is nothing actually

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added to the man, but that a great deal of what is lower in him has been done away with, and a fuller and greater thing released. It is in proportion to the measure in which the man himself—the man as normally known to his friends, his disciples, his companions—is put on one side and his inclinations expelled from their place in his consciousness, that the spirit can enter in, and as the spiritual tendencies are substituted for the normal tendencies of humanity the whole idea of anything personal gradually disappears. That which comes in is instinct with the universality of God, and it is no longer this or that mystic, this or that saint, that is active, but God unhindered and unsullied. But it will always, it must inevitably, appear to the onlooker that the particular individual is active—it is only he himself who knows that by the nature of things it cannot be so—and the increase in the power of the mystic's personality will therefore remain as the phrase best calculated to convey that which takes place. It may be expected, then, that in one who has made an appreciable measure of progress on the spiritual journey there will be exhibited a power of authority in certain respects that will differentiate him from the generality of his fellows. There will be no self-assertive claim to command on his part, but rather something bound up with his very existence which is of so high a character that it will command respect, as it were, naturally. It may perhaps be regarded as a quite unconscious power of impressiveness—a something indefinable which gives the impression of a strength and a fixity of purpose beyond the normal, and so impresses itself indelibly on the mind. For the mystic of some degree of attainment will deal with the concerns of the spirit no longer on hearsay or on intellectual grounds merely; he will speak no longer as one whose authority is tradition, for however high and holy that tradition may be, an appeal to it is always tainted to a greater or less degree with

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academicism. It is the stand-by of those who have heard of and, it may be, admired, but not experienced. But he will speak as one having an intimate and real knowledge: in place of stores of learning and unlimited theory there will be the knowledge of experience, and it is precisely this that the typical scribes lack. They have not made the journey themselves, and therefore have only heard of the by-paths and the difficult places, the houses of rest and the goal beyond. But the mystic has suffered the bitterness of the path which leads to an impasse, and the desolation of the valley of despair, as he has rested in the places of peace and known, it may be, something of the meaning of the end.

There seems no reason to suppose that this power of authority resulting from actual knowledge is able to be appreciated by those only who seek that knowledge themselves. It is not necessary to be spiritually minded, to use a common phrase, to become conscious of it. The more spiritual a man becomes, the more of spirit, that is, that he allows to enter into his consciousness, the more vivid will be his recognition of the power of attainment and the greater his response to it. Because of the measure of realization which he has himself, he is enabled to see a little of the way beneath the surface of things, and know perhaps something of the sources of the power which is manifested around him by the mystic. But, in a less degree, this recognition is common even to those who resent most violently the accusation of spirituality. The spirit indwells universally, urging on the most recalcitrant to the full knowledge of itself, pulling them, dragging them almost, hounding them on in spite of themselves. Man's resistance is simply the delay caused in an inexorable process leading to an inevitable end. And it is the fact of the spirit universally indwelling that enables a response to be awakened by the mystic of some degree of attainment even within the most improbable. The large measure

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of spirit which he manifests calls irresistibly to the spirit in them: it is like calling to like across an infinite abyss. And as his spirit is great, so is the power of love flowing out therefrom in all directions around him. To the extent in which the spirit has been freed for action by identification with the soul of the mystic, to such an extent the current sets out from him—the outgoing current of a supernal love.

When all else has proved useless, is not this power of love outflowing the one certain and irresistible force for good? Argument, proof, entreaty, can be met on their own ground and combated with their own weapons: the change of life which is essential to a knowledge of the spirit cannot be procured by such means alone because they fail to touch the source of life. But against love there is no defence. The entire revaluation which in one sense constitutes, and in another sense follows, the redirection of purpose and desire from the lower to the higher self—from man to God—is dependent on the awakening of the spirit within, and on the permission given to it to direct activity. It is so that the outflowing love of the spiritual adept touches the spirit of his hearers, and of those with whom he comes into contact. It is not what he says that brings them to his feet, but what he is: the love going out from him penetrates through all the wrappings of self-interest and beats down all the barriers of the mind, until, touching the spirit, it calls forth as from an enchanted sleep its purpose and its powers. It stirs to life the latent divinity in man, it nourishes by the gift of itself the sacred desire which is inseparable from that divinity, and goes with it until the force of the newly awakened love is strong enough to hold unswervingly to the ultimate ideal. For the one invincible thing in man is his desire for God, whether it be yet obscured, dormant, to all appearance non-existent; dim, fitful, and vacillating; or fully aroused

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and moving on with a steady advance towards its goal. The return to the spirit is the true return of the prodigal after years of wandering and devotion to the things that cannot finally satisfy, but when the return is made, it is made in the name of the whole man under the leadership of the spirit.

So is the power which accompanies a certain degree of attainment and emanates from him who has reached it a power of arousing in others the enthusiasm which rules his own life. It is not, in effect, a gift from him to them, but a force which compels them to realize the potentialities latent in themselves. It is a force of spiritual vitalization which rays out from him as inevitably and unconsciously as light from the sun, and under its influence the divine seed that is man's common heritage germinates, grows, flowers, and finally bears fruit itself.





## Chapter Fourteen

**I**N THE CASE OF ST. FRANCIS THE issue between the attitude of the mercenary who seeks a definite reward for his pains, and that of the friend whose obedience and service are offered in a spirit of untainted love, is clouded to a considerable extent by the circumstances of his life. He did not, as did many of the saints, stand alone as a figure bearing witness to the highest truths of the interior life, nor was he the leader and spiritual adviser of a body of men who were sheltered in their search for a common end by the protective influence of a monastery. He was the leader of a brotherhood whose cloister was the world, as well as a man ardently seeking for his widest fulfilment in God, and it is therefore in reference to this double character that his pronouncements on the question of interested action must be considered.

With regard to himself there does not seem any reasonable doubt that he refused to enrol himself among the ranks of the mercenaries, and definitely took his stand with those whose service was a free gift. To his intensely chivalrous nature it was the natural and obvious attitude: for the perfect knight of God the purpose of all his quests would be the glory gained for the sovereign he obeyed. It does not seem too much to conceive this as having been the instinctive position of St. Francis, which he attributed in turn to his brethren and followers with his characteristic simplicity, until he learned by sufficiently bitter experience that another attitude was not only possible, but actually taken by some among those he led. In the first flood of



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his enthusiasm, when he counted but six brethren who had declared his purpose their own, he identified their attitude with his own supreme disinterestedness, and took it for granted that they were no more impelled by a desire for gain than himself. When sending them out to preach the peace of the spiritual life he invited them to consider their vocation as he considered it; as being, that is, not so much for their own salvation as for that of the many,<sup>1</sup> and this belief in the purpose for which he had been sent remained with him continually. It is inconceivable that the man who spoke with so much scorn of the body, as symbolizing the lower part, demanding payment even for its tears,<sup>2</sup> should, in his turn, succumb to the temptation of seeking a reward for his labour, however painful it might be. For St. Francis to have done so would have been for him an apostasy from his most intimate ideal, which no recorded action or saying of his gives reason to suppose possible. He put before his brethren, in fact, with unmistakable clearness the highest aim which both he and they should hold before them in all their actions. Their works should be such that God would be praised thereby.<sup>3</sup> In conjunction with his expressed belief that they had been sent into the world for the salvation of the many, this counsel provides a sufficient reason for the doing of any act, and renders impossible the conception of any ultimate recompense entering into the consideration. "In this, then, may we glory," he was in the habit of saying, "if we render unto the Lord the glory that is His due, and if, while serving Him faithfully, we ascribe unto Him whatsoever He giveth."<sup>4</sup> To anyone sincerely trying to realize the life of the spirit there can be no confusion between that which enhances the splendour of that spirit and that which increases the power of its traditional antagonist. If the desire be in reality for the increase of

<sup>1</sup> *Legend*, 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Legend*, 58.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, ii, 134.

<sup>4</sup> Bonaventure, vi, 3.

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the sway of the spirit, and this only, the conception of reward is of necessity ruled out, because that which would receive the reward must undergo annihilation as a condition precedent to the enlargement of the spiritual life. Thus, to work, in St. Francis' phrase, for the salvation of the many, was to work for the increase of the power of the spiritual part in those by whom he was surrounded: their salvation, in a word, was the glory of the God who dwelt both in him and in them.

But while his whole temperament, as it appears from his own writings and from the writings of those who knew him, was opposed to the entrance of the mercenary idea into the spiritual life, and while there seems every reason to suppose that he successfully resisted such an entrance in his own case, there is no doubt that St. Francis came to the realization that a degree of disinterestedness which was possible for him was equally impossible for all his followers or for the world at large. It has been seen again and again that he recognized that the condition of his brethren demanded rules and counsels which were superfluous in his own case, and that he was therefore compelled, in his character of legislator for the brotherhood, to insist on disciplines of which he no longer felt the need for himself. So in the present case it would seem that instead of proclaiming as vital a degree of disinterestedness which he found them incapable of attaining, St. Francis tempered the rigours of what he knew to be true for himself to a point which he felt them to be capable of appreciating. The end which he held out to them was salvation—the merit of their own souls—in the first place, and in the second a reward based on their present labour. Thus he recommended that those should undertake the care of souls who should look for nothing of their own desires therein, but be willing to do what they felt to be the will of God in all things: they should be such men as put nothing before



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their own salvation.<sup>1</sup> Speaking as he evidently was of the more advanced among the brethren, St. Francis would in this way seem to have considered that their own salvation was a prize of sufficient attractiveness to induce them to lead a life likely to ensure it, and it is not in any way improbable that he felt that as they advanced towards their goal they would come to realize, as he had done, that ultimately even such a reward must be put out of the consideration when weighing the desirability of any action. Similarly for those who surrounded the ideal Minister-General as he pictured him, St. Francis desired men who sought nothing but the praise of God, the welfare of the Order, the merit of their own souls, and the perfect health of the brethren.<sup>2</sup>

But while he used the welfare of their souls to attract towards a measure of spirituality those whom he considered open to such an influence, he went a step farther with the two other classes of people with whom he had to deal. To the brethren at large and to the whole world outside the Order, St. Francis unquestionably offered the lure of a future reward in his dealings with them. Examples abound. Towards the end of his life, when his continual illness laid a heavy burden of attention on his companions, he felt that some among them were likely to complain of the interference that such attention caused to the ordinary method of their lives. He explained to them, therefore, that God would return to them the fruit of their works, he promised them that they would thereby obtain greater profit than if they had been free to live after their ordinary manner, and finally encouraged them by saying: "Ye ought to say thus: 'We will make our expense over thee, and the Lord will be our debtor on your account.'" But it should be noticed, in support of the contention that

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, lxxx,

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such a promise of reward was foreign to St. Francis' natural attitude, that Brother Leo, when describing the scene, especially adds that St. Francis said this with the object of raising the cowardice of their spirits, in the fear that without some such assurance of recompense they would become impatient and so, in reality, lose ground. The incident is perhaps as clear an instance as can be desired of the method employed by St. Francis in dealing with those whom he considered unable to bear the full measure of what he knew to be the true disinterestedness.<sup>1</sup>

There seems no reason to disbelieve that he was actuated by similar motives on the other occasions when an appeal to the interests of his hearers was made. At the Chapter of Mats in the year 1219 there was a gathering of five thousand brethren, and it was evidently beyond all probability that the entire number were ready to lay aside all claim to a reward. St. Francis therefore used the language which they would understand the best, and spoke of the great things that they were promised—a short suffering, but an everlasting glory.<sup>2</sup> Similarly he recommended the brethren in the Rule of 1223—by which time he may well be believed to have learned what could be expected from the world, and what it was still beyond reason to hope—to use the promises of glory in reward for good and punishment as consequent upon evil, in all their preaching to the people.<sup>3</sup> If this latter instance were to stand alone it might easily be considered as showing signs of the ecclesiastical influence which was admittedly brought to bear on St. Francis in connection with the framing of the whole of the final Rule, but being found, as it is, in company with other examples of a like nature which are in no way suspect, there is no ground for refusing to accept it as emanating from him. For the Letter to All the Faithful which he addressed

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, lxxxix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, lxviii; *Little Flowers*, xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Second Rule, chap. ix (*Writings*, p. 71).

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to the entire body of Christians in 1215, when he was prevented by illness from continuing to preach to them as he was accustomed to do, contains an appeal based unquestionably on a mercenary attitude. He exhorts his readers to give alms "because they wash souls from the foulness of sins," and reminds them that they carry with them after death the reward of charity and alms, "for which they shall receive a recompense and worthy remuneration from the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

This overmastering desire for spiritual welfare which drew him to accept from his followers so much less than he would have desired, rather than force them to risk losing everything, led St. Francis to consider very seriously the manner of life which would be most conducive to the common good. The question resolved itself for him in general into a choice between two alternatives—a life of contemplation on the one hand and a life of external activity on the other. It seems evident that his own nature inclined to the former of these two possibilities, yet there was something in him which led him to shrink from embracing the contemplative life as it was then understood. It is recorded that at one period of his life he was in the habit of passing

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, p. 102. The episode at Montefeltro in the spring of 1213, when St. Francis took as his text two lines from a popular song—"Tanto è il bene ch'aspetto, ch'ogni pena m'è diletto"—is usually regarded as a striking example of his insistence on a future reward as consolation for a present pain (see Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 159; Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. ii, p. 237). But as it stands the couplet which proclaims that "so great is the good that I await, that all pain is a delight to me" does not necessarily point to this conclusion. It is evidently open to the interpretation that the assurance of a future joy is so certain that it casts something of its radiance even over the immediate suffering—the suffering is not borne with a view to earning the joy, but is transfigured by the foreknowledge of the joy that is in store. There are states both of mind and of body when pain is readily transformed into an unexpectedly acute pleasure. See *Little Flowers*, First Consideration of the Most Holy Stigmata, for the account of the incident.

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the whole day alone in his cell, coming out only when he was compelled to do so by the absolute need of food. On such occasions he would disregard the ordinary hours of the community, being mastered, as his biographer says, by a greater craving for contemplation.<sup>1</sup> Prayer was for him the means by which the soul received its own proper nourishment, which is God,<sup>2</sup> and as his interests were of the soul rather than of anything else, it was inevitable that a life of contemplation should hold for him an almost overpowering attraction. Yet, on the other hand, he felt from the first that the opportunities for an entirely contemplative life which then offered themselves were not such as he could accept. On his journey to Rome to obtain the confirmation of the Primitive Rule he successfully resisted the invitation of the cardinal to become either a monk or a hermit, for in spite of the vista of peace and seclusion which such a proposal laid open he felt the imperative need of a life which should more definitely take into consideration the wants of his fellow creatures.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the monastic life as such seems never to have appealed to him, whether such a view resulted from a natural disposition or from an experience of the monasteries that were then in existence, as seems more probable. The three Orders, as finally constituted by him, were adapted to provide society with the advantages of such places, without incurring their dangers. They were not, as were monastic institutions or the then existing orders, framed to include any one type or class to the exclusion of any other, but offered their privileges to men and women, single or married, without any distinction other than into the three divisions of one great brotherhood, with Rules adapted to their several necessities. The renunciation of property was a condition of reception

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 96; *Mirror*, xciv; Bonaventure, x, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, i, 33.



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into the First and Second Orders, and the great advantage of freedom from anxiety about food and clothing, which characterized the enclosed monk or nun, was retained by the simple expedient of taking literally no thought for the morrow, and believing implicitly that if they sought the kingdom of heaven as the first necessity, everything else that was needful would be provided. In the case of the Tertiaries the same freedom from anxiety was assured as far as possible by their custom of distributing their superfluous possessions when their own bare necessities had been provided for.<sup>1</sup> The members of all three Orders were thus as free as the monk to praise God and give themselves to prayer without material distractions, but had the additional privilege, when they belonged to the First Order or the Third, of directly serving their fellow men.

It is in these institutions that the divine humanity of St. Francis stands out in all its clearness. His life, and the lives of those whom he led, were practical examples of the manner in which it was possible to live literally in the world, and yet to struggle against its current rather than to be carried with it. He avoided the obviously fallacious attitude which is fondly held by some at all periods of humanity's evolution, that, as all things are given by God, it is therefore desirable to accept them at their face value, forgetting that their true employment depends on an interior attitude, and not on their external use or neglect. And he avoided with equal care the position of exaggerated aloofness, which is so horrified at the baseness of the world and its contents that it is unwilling to risk being smirched

<sup>1</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 286, and Appendix III. Cf. Sabatier, *Opuscules de Critiques Historiques*, fasc. i, for a consideration of St. Francis' own attitude towards the Third Order, as distinct from that of the Church. See also Sabatier, *Vie*, chap. ix, p. 177, and chap. xv, pp. 305 *et seq.*



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by any contact with them. He did not cut himself and his brethren off from mankind, but so constituted his Orders that their members should be hindered by no temporal considerations from concentrating their efforts on the spiritual welfare of the world at large. He went even to the extent of refusing to have a large tonsure since it was the mark of the monastic state, giving as his reason for preferring the smaller or clerical tonsure that he wished his simple brethren to have a share of his head—that he wished it to be evident, that is, that he and his Order were open to all who would throw in their lot with them, and not confined to the learned or rich who were in general to be found in the monasteries.<sup>1</sup>

It was the conflict between these two tendencies—towards a life of contemplation without the limitations of a monastery, and towards a life of activity dedicated to the service of his fellow men—that caused St. Francis considerable uncertainty at more than one period of his life. It does not seem to have been so much that his inclination led him to the former and his sense of duty to the latter, as that, besides his natural leaning towards the contemplative life, he considered himself very little fitted for an existence in which he would be called upon to direct the activities of a large body of men. The question first arose in a definite form on his return from the confirmation of the Primitive Rule at Rome, when he was staying with his few brethren in the ruined tombs near the city of Orte. After their experience of the unwonted activity of a great city they realized to the full the advantages of a retreat wherein they could commune with God, undisturbed by all that passed without. They spoke of the worthiness of such a life, and compared it with that in which they would be in continual contact with the world, combating its evils, but

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 193. See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 86 and note 2.

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also facing its unknown perils. But on this occasion St. Francis decided for both them and himself that it was more desirable to fulfil the office which he felt had been entrusted to them, by preaching to the people as he had lately gained permission to do from the Pope. The decision was not arrived at without thought or without prayer, but once taken by St. Francis it was accepted without demur by his followers.<sup>1</sup> St. Francis was convinced that his mission was to preach to one and all, and he continued in the direction he had taken at this early stage of his ministry until he found himself faced with circumstances which led him to doubt its wisdom. This occurred some three years later, when his first attempt to preach to the people of the Holy Land was frustrated by his ship being driven out of its course and eventually thrown on to the coast of Dalmatia.<sup>2</sup> When he finally regained Italy he began seriously to question whether he were intended for the life of a wandering preacher, and all the doubts that he had put to rest in the retreat at Orte assailed him with renewed force. He was now concerned not, as formerly, with the character which the Order was to assume, but with the question solely of whether he personally should continue as he had been doing, or whether he should retire to a life given entirely to prayer. The reasons which weighed with him are given by St. Bonaventure with an incomparable delicacy and penetration: "It came to pass that he fell into great striving with himself by reason of a doubt, the which that he might end—on his return after many days of prayer—he set before the Brethren that were his intimates. 'What,' saith he, 'do ye counsel, Brethren, what do ye commend? Shall I devote myself unto prayer, or shall I go about preaching? Of a truth, I that am little, and simple, and rude in speech have received more grace of

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 35. See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, i, 55.

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prayer than of speaking. Now in prayer, there seemeth to be the gain and heaping up of graces, in preaching, a certain giving-out of the gifts received from heaven; in prayer, again, a cleansing of the inward feelings, and an union with the one, true, and highest good, together with a strengthening of virtue; in preaching the spiritual feet wax dusty, and many things distract a man, and discipline is relaxed. Finally, in prayer, we speak with God and hear Him, and live as it were the life of Angels, while we converse with Angels; in preaching we must needs practise much condescension toward men and living among them as fellow men must think, see, say, and hear such things as pertain to men. Yet one thing is there to set against these, the which in God's sight would seem to weigh more than they all, to wit, that the only-begotten Son of God, Who is the highest wisdom, left His Father's bosom for the salvation of souls. . . . ' Wherefore ' it seemeth that it might be more acceptable unto God that, laying aside leisure, I should go forth unto the work.' ”<sup>1</sup>

In such discussions with himself and his companions St. Francis is seen with peculiar clearness struggling in his dilemma. His passionate love for contemplation and his absolute belief in the reality of the communion that such prayer established with God, are balanced against the great desire of his life—to follow Christ faithfully in everything. But however much he discussed, and whatever good counsel his brethren offered him, he was unable to come to any decision on the question which occupied him. He decided, therefore, to appeal to two people whose sanctity he believed would ensure their discovering to him the certain will of God. The first was Sister Clare and the second Brother Sylvester, and he sent one of the brethren to them in succession, with instructions to beg them to inquire in

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, xii, 1.

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their prayers what the divine will might be in respect of him. The answers they returned agreed completely, and bade him continue in the life of preaching which he had begun. This decision he accepted, and departed without hesitation to preach not only to inhabitants of the surrounding villages, but to the birds also in the trees by his way.<sup>1</sup>

But though St. Francis found himself committed to a life of external activity both by his own decision and by what he accepted as the voice of God speaking through Clare and Sylvester, he sought continually and unremittingly to combine with it the contemplative life towards which so much of his nature tended. There is an occasion, it is true, when he rebuked one of the brethren who was over given to solitude, and warned him against withdrawing from his religion and the brethren under an appearance of holiness,<sup>2</sup> which suggests that St. Francis was awake to the dangers to which such a form of life might give rise. But there is no ground for supposing him to have subscribed to the now popular belief that a life of contemplation is a life of selfishness. His conclusion was that which is evidenced by his life; that the highest life which it is possible to lead is one in which the strength and the power to be effectively active in the outer world are gained in the mysteries of contemplation. Activity without contemplation may be both holy and effective, contemplation without activity may be equally holy and (*pace* the rationalist) even more effective, but it is the combination of both by which the effectiveness and the holiness are raised to their highest power. And this is the conclusion not only of St. Francis, but of the mystical theology which has been built up on the lives of him and his companions in sanctity: "to burn in contemplation,

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, xii, 2, 3; *Little Flowers*, xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 32, 33.



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and to communicate to others the light of one's inward fire—this is perfection.”<sup>1</sup>

The life of St. Francis is thus found to be interspersed with periods during which he retired from all external activity to gain strength and inspiration from his prayer, as the country in which he lived chiefly is covered with the refuges to which he retired. The forty days during which he isolated himself on the island in Lake Trasimene, “whereon no man dwelt,” may stand as an example of one of these periodical retreats. On a day immediately preceding one Lent he was staying with one of his disciples near the lake, and the idea came to him to keep the whole Lent in solitude on the island. He therefore persuaded the brother to take him there in secret, and leave him on the uninhabited island with no other nourishment than two loaves of bread, arranging that the brother should not return for him until the day before Good Friday. To this plan the brother consented, and the forty days' retreat was occupied by St. Francis in prayer and contemplation. It is recorded also that he fasted during virtually the whole time, for on the brother's return it was found that St. Francis had only eaten a half of one of the loaves.<sup>2</sup> He felt the necessity of frequent retirements of a like nature, and the small cell which may still be seen at the Carceri near Assisi, hidden away in a cleft of the mountains, bears witness to the solitude which on such occasions he found to be an imperative need. For the rest, as a recent biographer has well remarked, some cave or grotto is invariably to be found in proximity to the places in and around Umbria where the greater part of his time was spent. As Assisi had its Carceri, so had Narni, Borgo-san-Sepolcro, Rieti, Cortona, Chiusi, and in fact all parts of the country, their places of retreat.<sup>3</sup> And

<sup>1</sup> Scaramelli, *Il Direttorio Mistico*, tratt. ii, cap. xxii, sec. 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers*, vii.

<sup>3</sup> Joergensen, *St. François*, book ii, chap. i, p. 105.



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this need of being alone was not confined to one period of his life only. During the tumultuous times which succeeded his declaration of allegiance to the Lady Poverty he would continually betake himself to a cave near the town to struggle with the difficulties and objections which arose within him;<sup>1</sup> he retired to wander alone on Monte Subasio when he had finally broken away from his father;<sup>2</sup> and the practice seems to have increased rather than diminished as he grew older. It was his custom towards the end of his life to take certain of the more intimate brethren with him to ensure complete solitude, for as his fame grew it became increasingly difficult to escape from the importunities of his friends. He was willing, as his biographer says, "to devote one part of his time to the profit of his neighbour, and to spend the other in the blessed retirement of contemplation," but during these latter times he would allow no interference or disturbance of any kind.<sup>3</sup> At the most he would appear on the threshold of his cell and make over his visitors the sign of the cross from a distance.<sup>4</sup>

The same need for solitude is particularly evident during the closing years of his life. With the approbation of the Rule of 1223 he felt that the period of his active ministry was in some sense completed and sealed, and he gave himself with renewed devotion to the fuller life which he lived within. He definitely withdrew from publicity, and passed the following Christmas in celebrating the sacramental mystery of the Incarnation among the peasants in the caves at Greccio.<sup>5</sup> He remained there till Easter had passed, and in the autumn of the same year retired to

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 6; *Legend*, 12. There seems no doubt that this period of prayer in the cave came after the declaration, and not before it. See Joergensen, *St. François*, book i, chap. v, pp. 37 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, ii, 5. <sup>3</sup> Celano, i, 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 45. <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 84-6.

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Monte Alvernia. On this occasion he not only took some of his brethren with him to act as a protection against the importunities of the outer world, but finally chose a place for his cell so far removed from the brethren that they could not hear him when he called. And it was in this utter solitude that he experienced the final mystery that marked him with the Stigmata of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

This division of time between the active and the contemplative life found its natural parallel in the regulations and recommendations which St. Francis gave to his followers. In the description of the perfect Minister-General, the proper fulfilment of which office was a source of continual interest and anxiety to St. Francis, he explains that the ideal Minister should be a man with a natural inclination to prayer, who should so order his day that part of it would be given to his own soul and part to the management of those who were entrusted to his care. His day should begin with the celebration of Mass and with his own prayer, and when he had so fitted himself for his external activities he should appear in public and be ready to attend to whatever might arise.<sup>2</sup> The same principle is apparent in the regulations drawn up for such of the brethren as should feel in their turn drawn towards the occasional solitude of one of the hermitages that St. Francis himself frequented, or a similar place chosen for the same purpose. It was advised that there should be three brothers together, or four at most, and two of them should be regarded as mothers and the two or one remaining as sons. The mothers were to lead the life of Martha and keep apart from everyone, in particular guarding against any intrusion on the privacy of the sons. These were to devote themselves to the part of Mary and to have each his own separate place, so that (if there were two of them)

<sup>1</sup> *Little Flowers*, Second Consideration of the Most Holy Stigmata.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 185; *Mirror*, lxxx.

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they might neither sleep nor live together. No one was to be allowed to enter their cloister, and the only persons to whom they were to speak were their mothers for the time being, and their custos when he should visit them. The mothers and the sons were to fulfil their offices alternately, so that the whole number living together would reap the benefits of solitude in their turn. Such a regulation, providing for a peaceful retreat from the normally active life of the brethren when they should feel the need of it, is eloquent as to the value which St. Francis laid on both sides of the religious life, and the care with which he provided for them in the lives of all his followers.<sup>1</sup> For him it was not only true that *laborare est orare*, but also that *orare est laborare*, and the work of prayer demanded, and received, its full consideration and attention.

For a man to whom prayer was a means of "union with the one, true, and highest good," it is easy to understand that spiritual experience provided a very genuine increase of power and capacity. There are two instances which stand out from the generality of what must have been recurring phenomena in his life, of which the first took place at the beginning and the second nearly at the end of his activity. The moments which he spent before the Crucifix in San Damiano, when he heard the voice of Christ speaking in his heart, sent him away filled with a force and an inspiration which would brook no resistance. Celano's phrase is that, "having been smitten by unwonted visitations, he found himself another man than he who had gone in." He adds that St. Francis felt the change he had undergone to be ineffable, and it is from the moment of this experience that the vitality which he already felt within him was increased a hundredfold.<sup>2</sup> It urged him to seek money for the work of rebuilding the ruined church,

<sup>1</sup> Of Living Religiously in a Hermitage (*Writings*, p. 89).

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 10.

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and gave him strength finally to withstand his father's anger and make the entire renunciation of all his possessions before the Bishop of Assisi. It upheld him not only in the actual work of restoration, which must have been a heavy task for St. Francis' strength, but in the almost agonizing difficulty of facing the contempt which the whole city poured out on his new method of life. It enabled him to rebuild the chapel of the Portiuncula which was to be the centre of the future Order, and brought him to the Mass which was said there on the feast of St. Matthias in a frame of mind so responsive to every call that his mission was sealed by the reading of the Gospel. The command "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves . . ." appealed to him then with a directness which gave him no alternative but to obey in the most complete and literal sense. He must have both read the words and heard them read before on more than one occasion, but it needed just the responsiveness of his mind at that moment to apply them to himself as a definite command. And the result was that he went out into the world speaking such words "that his hearers were rapt in amazement as they listened," and forthwith drew to him the first companions of the Order of St. Francis.<sup>1</sup> This astonishing initial force may well have faded to some degree before the difficulties and pain which he encountered, but the source from which it sprang was ever open to him through the medium of his prayer, and his continual effectiveness is sufficient evidence that he did not neglect it.

An even greater access of initiative seems to have followed on the experience of Monte Alvernia, though St. Francis' crippled condition prevented him from actualizing all the new projects which he had in mind.

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 21, 22; Bonaventure, iii, 1; *Legend*, 25-7.



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He was by this time suffering severely from dropsy, the wounds in his body caused him continual pain and prevented him from moving except at the price of acute suffering, and the disease of the eyes which it is suggested that he contracted during his journey to the East took a decided turn for the worse. Yet, these disabilities notwithstanding, he insisted on riding through the country surrounding Assisi (since it was physically impossible for him to walk) and preaching to the people in words that must have gained much in fire from the realization to which he had lately come.<sup>1</sup> He was vibrant with the full recognition of the unity of the world and of all his fellow men, and his concern for their spiritual progress allowed him no rest. His vision of the tremendous heights to which attainment had been proved possible in his own person filled him with a renewed passion to lead other men as far on that ascent as might be, and all that he had accomplished till then faded into insignificance before his realization of what remained to be done. "Let us begin to serve God," he would cry to his brethren, "for hitherto we have profited little or nothing," and in the white heat of his enthusiasm he proposed to begin literally again where he had begun at first, and serve the lepers as in his earliest days.<sup>2</sup> For St. Francis understood most vividly that his personal efforts were inconsiderable at all times, and that any work was done well only when the immediate doer became a channel for the communication of the force of God. And since on Alvernia his smaller personality and all its hindrances had been finally sacrificed, and its place taken by an irresistible force which he knew to be not his own, he looked back on his life with a vivid recognition of the many ways in which he would now be better fitted to cope with its difficulties. He could apply to them the new conception and treat them more wholly on the

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 98.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 103; Bonaventure, xiv, 1.



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plane of spirit than he had ever done before, with the proportionate certainty of finding a more complete solution. For his realization was of the love which enfolded everything, the fundamental oneness of God and His creation, and therefore of the universality which underlay all division and all difference. Living, acting, loving on such a plane continually, he was fitted as never before for dealing with the world of division.

It was in such an abiding realization brought home to him as a certainty beyond all doubt, that St. Francis wrote the Canticle of the Sun, the Hymn of the Praises of the Creatures, when he was lying ill in a wattle hut at San Damiano after the stigmatization. It is the triumph-song of oneness, founded on a comprehension of the eternal co-existence of all manifestation in its Creator, and a paean of gratitude to Him therefor. It rose to St. Francis' lips in spite of the bitterness of his suffering, and although his activities were circumscribed by his illness the song to which it gave birth went out through the world as an ecstatic assurance of the final unity of all in the Fatherhood of God. It is a matter of history that it brought peace and reconciliation where there had been strife,<sup>1</sup> and the vividness of the conception from which it had arisen was so great to St. Francis that he was anxious to teach it to a certain number of his brethren and send them through the world to sing it to all the peoples.<sup>2</sup> And in the fulness of heart which continued after his supreme experience, he sent letter after letter to the rulers and custodes, exhorting them to encourage the people to praise and venerate at all times and in all places the God Whom he now knew in the centre of his being.<sup>3</sup>

To this same source of spiritual experience may be traced what, for want of a better term, may be called the

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, ci.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, c.

<sup>3</sup> See *Writings*, pp. 125, 127, and Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 362.

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personal influence which St. Francis exercised over those who knew or heard him. There is a striking passage in the biography written by the brethren who knew him most intimately, which ascribes to him at an early period of his life a large measure of this power. The *Legend* speaks of him as having first convinced himself in deed of whatsoever he preached in words to others, so that he might in full confidence declare the truth.<sup>1</sup> In such testimony there is a hint of experience reaching into other regions than the normal one, of the adventures of the preacher having been in the plane of spirit as well as in the sphere of everyday morality. To have told his hearers that they should lead honest and peaceful lives would have suggested that he himself had some knowledge of honesty and peace, but to assure them, as St. Francis unquestionably did, that the coming of the kingdom of heaven is consequent upon the sacrifice of the present world, suggested with equal force that he had himself so found something of the kingdom of which he spoke. To have spoken of it as a matter of intellectual conviction might have interested those of his hearers who were attracted towards such speculations, to have spoken of it as a matter of tradition would have appealed to few, but to speak of it as an experience of which he himself had tasted both the bitterness and the sweet was to carry conviction into the minds of all who heard him. No strength of belief, no loftiness of purpose, could have convinced them as did the profound sincerity with which St. Francis spoke from the treasure of his own experience, so that—as his brethren said—“men marvelled at the power of his discourses.” But it was not merely that his words went straight to the hearts of his audience. It was in himself especially that the power lay—he became increasingly, as he penetrated always farther into the

<sup>1</sup> *Legend*, 54.

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mystery of the spirit, a centre of force. The inspiration radiated from him, communicating itself to those with whom he came into contact so that their opposition was gradually broken down, and they went away, whether they were members of the Order or men and women living in the world, comforted and strengthened by something which was beyond their comprehension. To incalculable numbers of those whom he met and left again he was the occasion of a complete change of life, by reason of the love which flowed out from him and suffered no resistance. To those with whom he lived and became intimate he was a source of strength which sufficed to uphold them in all the difficulties they had to face in their arduous life, and it is easy to credit the *Legend* with literal exactness when it speaks of those who had received his blessing going through the world, as pilgrims, with great rejoicing of spirit.<sup>1</sup>

And this influence was felt by people of all types and ranks. The Bishop of Ostia, who later as Cardinal became Protector of the Order and as Pope Gregory IX canonized St. Francis, manifested a warm friendship to him from the first. He recognized in him a man in whom the spirit shone through the humanity, and witnessed that however disturbed he might be it was sufficient to see and talk to St. Francis, to drive away all his anxiety and vexation and restore him to complete serenity. Discontent could not survive the radiance of the joy with which he was filled, and the fact of his presence was a refreshment for the past and an encouragement for the future.<sup>2</sup> An interesting testimony to the measure in which this was felt by those who knew him is found in an incident which has been preserved in one of the earliest biographies. A natural philosopher, who is credited with being both eloquent and learned, had been listening to St. Francis, and found, to his

<sup>1</sup> *Legend*, 59. Cf. Celano, i, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, i, 101.

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surprise, that the words conveyed a great deal more than appeared on their surface. The spiritual power which inspired the preacher communicated itself in some degree to the philosopher, so that the words which were used became the merest skeleton of what St. Francis really expressed. Because of his concern with the more subtle message, his hearer experienced the greatest difficulty in recalling any of the actual words which were used, and discovered that if he succeeded in remembering any of them by a particular effort, they did not appear subsequently to be the same that he had originally heard.<sup>1</sup> There was lacking, in fact, the something which can only be communicated by actual life—the force of the spirit flowing through the words and clothing them with its vitality and its light. And it was assuredly the strange dignity which the budding consciousness of the spirit imparted to St. Francis almost from the beginning of his ministry, which went far in gaining him a hearing among the people. When he was repairing San Damiano the whole populace, led by his own family, laughed at him unmercifully, but when he felt that his mission was finally sealed by the injunction heard in the Gospel at the Portiuncula, he went out to face the world with a new certainty and a new assurance. And as he spoke his hearers felt an unexpected solemnity steal over them; the something which was alive and active in the depths of St. Francis called forth some dim response in themselves; their spirit quickened and answered the call that it had heard, and the natural desire to scoff gave way to an instinctive movement towards adoration.<sup>2</sup> The “God give you peace” with which he met them was astonishing as a salutation, but were they not forced to a realization of something of its beauty by the unaccustomed stillness that fell among them? Was there really an interior peace

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Legend*, 25; *Bonaventure*, iii, 2.

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which could transfigure their ceaseless striving in a world given over to war, and was it to be found in the teaching, and the example of this amazing beggar ? The thousands who flocked to join their way to his are the final evidence of the force that inspired St. Francis, and of the fraternity of the spirit which his own experience in the realms of the spirit enabled him to demonstrate to the world.





## *Chapter Fifteen*

**T**HE END OF ALL IS GOD. CONSCIOUSLY to the mystic, and unconsciously but ultimately to some who would resent the name, the aim of all activity has been one and one only, in spite of all multiplicity of method. For him, the end does not only crown the work, but gives each detail of it its meaning. Work for the sake of the work becomes a counsel without significance, for it is only in respect of the end that the work assumes any value. There is thus a unity running through the mystic's life which is wanting in the lives of many—a thread upon which his actions are strung, which leads finally to Deity. And it is evidently a unity of principle rather than of detail that will mark his activities. He is no more bound down to a particular sphere of usefulness or to a particular type of action than he is limited to the tenets of a particular creed; the essentials of mysticism underlie and vitalize all creeds as for the mystic they spiritualize all that he does in any branch of life. Essentially he is therefore supremely free, inasmuch as he can be confronted with no circumstances where God may not be found, with no abyss of despair wherefrom the divine certainty is absent. There are periods, it is notorious, when the veils of darkness are such as to prevent any consciousness of the all-pervading light, but however bitter may be the privation, it is for the mystic to pursue his way unflinching, not only in the knowledge that God is there, and in the certainty that the shadow is the veiling of an intolerable splendour, but in the unalterable

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belief that all roads that are followed in love and aspiration lead finally to Him.

The fundamental purpose, then, of obedience, poverty, and chastity is God; they are means towards Him; and to consider them as aimed at anything less is to degrade them from their high office. Yet it will be remembered that just because the unfailing motive must be love in its purest and least personal sense, there can never be any question of the person claiming God as the prize of his labours. The end of all, it may be said with equal truth, is love, and this is not to be realized while the acquisitive instinct is in the ascendant, or at any time before all the gates are thrown open so that That which is eternally waiting may come and dwell in the consciousness. No man can make God his own, but he may at his highest allow himself to be made one with God. His greatest activity is not to clutch something to himself, but a permissive process whereby that which he calls "I" is overwhelmed.

This paradoxical union with God, which is the highest fulfilment of him who seeks it, and must yet be sought solely for the honour of That which is sought, is the ceaseless quest of humanity through the centuries. The symbolisms of almost every human activity have been used to treat of it. At times the aim has been to obscure the issue and its processes so that the world at large should not profane the mystery which it could not comprehend, while those whose insight enabled them to penetrate beneath the surface of the symbol should not only read its secret, but realize its life in themselves. At others the symbolism has been used as a means of elucidating a difficult point of understanding, so that the mind might be led to comprehension by means of a parallel known to most; and yet at others it has been employed by those whose experience has been in reality ineffable, to express to their co-heirs of eternity some hint of a process which is peculiar to each, yet has a

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common basis and a common end, for their confirmation and encouragement. Now it was the obscure processes of alchemy which contained the teaching and the message, when the terms of a physical science were taken to convey the intimations of a spiritual experience, and the Philosopher's Stone and the Tincture represented, for those who were capable of understanding, the spiritual essence which transformed all that it touched. Again the witness was found in the science of architecture, and the masons who built the house were in reality engaged in building the Temple of the King where He might fitly dwell. Masonry is a vehicle of the truth, whether the members of its lodges be aware of it to-day, or not; the image of the parts of a temple was taken by Lopukhin (himself both a Mason and a mystic) to represent the varying stages on the quest.<sup>1</sup> The exploits of chivalry find their life in the same purpose—that of veiling and conveying at the same time the story of the divine search—and the Graal is not only the vessel which received the Blood of Christ, but becomes also the life of God dwelling in mankind.<sup>2</sup> The symbolism of the journey in all its possible forms has also been used continually, as being especially fitted to carry the great intimation. In *The Seven Valleys* of Fariduddin Attar, a Persian Sufi of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the chief stages of the way are described under the symbolism of the valleys which must be crossed to reach God, the spokesman in this case being the hoopoe, who explains to the other birds the general character of each valley which lies between them and the Simurgh, which stands for the object of their quest. The *Itinerarius mentis in Deum* of St. Bonaventure pro-

<sup>1</sup> I. V. Lopukhin, *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church*, e.g., chap. ii. See A. E. Waite, *The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, for a very full discussion, and *The Meaning of Masonry* by W. L. Wilmshurst.

<sup>2</sup> See, for an exhaustive discussion of the question in all its aspects, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*, by A. E. Waite.

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claims its own symbolism, and Ruysbroeck employed the same image in his *Seven Steps in the Ascent of Spiritual Love*. For St. John of the Cross it was the Ascent of Mount Carmel, and in countless literatures the Mountain of Initiation conveys the same idea. St. Teresa described her own experience under the likeness of an Interior Castle, to the central room of which the soul gradually penetrated from the outer courts. In her autobiography the stages are the several waters with which God refreshes the garden of the soul, and the metaphor of gardening, from the time when the kingdom of heaven was likened to a mustard seed, has been continually employed. But perhaps the most universal and the favourite symbol has been that of the soul and God as the Lover and the Beloved. The theme has been taken as conveying the central truth, and embroidered with innumerable devices by countless lovers of the Absolute, and in the West one of the accepted names for the Perfect Union—the Spiritual Marriage—remains as evidence of its appeal. For the rest, the mystical literature of Persia is saturated with the conception to such an extent that a casual reader may overlook the underlying intimations, and the Song of Songs, even to this day, is as often regarded as mere eroticism as it is passed by as an impossible allegory of the relations between Christ and the Church.

But, apart from metaphor and behind the veils of all symbolisms, what is signified? What, ultimately, does it mean for man that he builds the Temple of the King, that he succeeds in the High Quest of the Graal, that he ascends the Mountain of Initiation, that he penetrates even to the innermost room of the Castle that is within? Or if the full answer to such questions be possible only for those who bring the quest to its proper end, and if even they can only stammer unintelligible replies to those who beseech them for a clear account, how much of the real content of



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the search and of its final goal can be regarded as applicable to those who sincerely seek? The answer would be that the whole content is applicable, and that no system of presentation is closed, to those who are gifted with spiritual insight and whose search is inspired by a genuinely unselfish love. The intimations of those who have gone before upon the way are of a value beyond pearls, but the concern for the moment is more particularly with such an idea of the end—of the Divine Union—as may find expression.

The conception of God which is real to each individual must necessarily vary in every case, so long as there is no actual knowledge which can take the place of speculation. Besides representing, in however general a way, the summit of his desires, it will be tinged with his philosophy, and therefore be open to whatever variation those desires and that philosophy may undergo. And even when speculation has given place to some degree of knowledge, it cannot fairly be expected that the reports which are given of the high experience will agree in every detail between themselves. The entire weight of a life's tradition, the teachings and beliefs which have been made its own, the subtle influences of character and temperament, will all play their part in colouring, if not the experience itself, yet at least the account of it which may find its way into words. Even the symbols and the allegories employed in the agonized attempt to describe the ineffable, will unconsciously produce an impression peculiar to the one individual. And yet, in spite of this, there remain two large categories into which it is possible to range practically every conception of God. By all mystical hypotheses God is everywhere—unconfined by Space and unlimited by Time, there can be no place or period where or when He is not. He is universal; an all-penetrating Spirit, an all-pervading Essence. With this as the underlying assumption there have been further accepted the two points of view by which



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the emphasis is put in particular either on God as being within each individual, or on God as being concealed behind the visible surface of all manifested nature. These two views are obviously two different sides of but a single conception, and have received their emphasis according to the requirements of different temperaments. On one side the conception of the indwelling deity, on the other that of the deity immanent more especially in all things, has presented all that was most precious and sublime, and it would be but an impertinence to pretend that one is of greater value than the other. It is, however, with the more particularly subjective view that the present chapter is concerned, the consideration of the attitude which may be regarded as objective being reserved until later.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, the essence of the position that the God with Whom union is to be accomplished is within, is evidently that He is in some sense the Higher Self of the individual who seeks Him. That self is, at the least, an aspect of Him—the aspect which manifests itself by such an incarnation, and which must be conceived therefore as having that direct consciousness of God and of its relation to God as had that aspect in its completely free incarnation in Christ historically. In fact, the relationship between Himself and God stated by Christ to be His seems unquestionably to be that attributed to the Real Self by the Christian mystic. This point of the mystical doctrine has already been treated at some length, when it was seen that the Real Self is unquestionably regarded as divine.<sup>2</sup> St. Catherine of Genoa summed up all beliefs and statements on this point when she said that “the proper centre of everyone is God himself,” and that “my I is God, nor do I recognize any other Me, except my God Himself.”<sup>3</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> See chap. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> See chap. i.

<sup>3</sup> Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, p. 265. That this doctrine of St. Catherine does not depend on a single reference will

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amounts to a conception of the relation between man and God wherein there is considered to be a likeness in kind—an essential likeness; and a difference in degree, which is in most cases an actual difference. Man is potentially divine—in the sense that Christ was and is divine—as the seed is potentially the full-grown tree, and he only reaches the fulfilment of his being by finally becoming so. Until then he is only in a state of development, and often enough of arrested development; he is incomplete and therefore unsatisfied until he be fulfilled in God. If the difference were an absolute difference of kind, such a completion would be impossible of any sort of human comprehension, even theoretical: it would need a reversal of the laws which appear to govern all the worlds, as though an acorn should produce a man. It would mean a sharp dividing line, to pass over which a sudden miracle would be indispensable, instead of the gradual miracle of daily growth in sanctity. In a word, man does not become divine by a portent worked from without, but by a growth from within

be clear from the following sayings: "The love of God is our true self-love, the love characteristic of and directed to our true selves, since these selves of ours were created by and for Love Itself. The love, on the other hand, of every other thing deserves to be called self-hatred, since it deprives us of our true self-love, which is God." "God so loves the soul, and is so ready to give it His graces, that, when He is impeded by some sin, then men say: 'Thou hast offended God,' that is, thou hast driven away God from thee, Who, with so much love, was desiring to do thee good. And men say this, although it is really man who then suffers the damage and who offends his own true self." "Thou couldst discover (O soul), that God is continually willing whatsoever our true selves are wishing." "In truth the divine precepts, although they are contrary to our sensuality, are nevertheless according to our spirit which, of its very nature, is ever longing to be free from all bodily sensations, so as to be able to unite itself to God through love." In the last quotation the point to be remarked is the essential divinity of the spirit which desires what God desires, and its bondage in unregenerate man. See Von Hügel, *op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. 262, 263.

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through the degrees of likeness which lie between him and God.

Now, at any given moment a man is limited only by the limits of that of which he is able to be conscious. In his entirety he cannot be said to be constituted by the state of consciousness in which he may happen to be for any chosen second, for he may be concentrated upon some particular subject and his attention completely engrossed by it. To take a concrete case: if he be occupied in reading a book on physiology and find it necessary to put all other thoughts aside while he is so engaged, the content of his consciousness will be, for the moment, physiology pure and simple. It is of physiology that he will be aware, and during the period in question nothing else will find place in his consciousness, but obviously he is not, for this, constituted by his knowledge of that science. When the momentary concentration of attention is past, a host of other thoughts and preoccupations will fill the field of his awareness, and these in their turn will give place to yet others. But no instant inventory of the contents of his consciousness will represent the entire man; this can only be reached by a consideration of all the things of which he is capable of becoming conscious if the circumstances arise. If there be things, whether thoughts or sensations or concrete objects, which cannot penetrate into and have an effect upon his consciousness, they are, for the time being, non-existent for the man in question. Even if they be regarded as affecting that last resource of psychology, the subconsciousness, they will become fully real for him only when they or their results penetrate from that vague realm into that part of his consciousness which is above the threshold. A man's relation to anything, that is, varies with his ability to be conscious of it, and this variation ranges from complete non-consciousness to so intense a pitch of consciousness that the thing is to all intents and purposes a part of himself.

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Similarly, and not less evidently, his relations with the world of which he *is* conscious will depend upon the character of his states of consciousness. In the first place, what at one time appears to him all-desirable will at another leave him completely indifferent, though the object in question do not appear to have undergone any change. The change is in the man; that is, in the degree to which his consciousness reacts to the object. Where at one time nothing that was vital could penetrate into him, at another he will be filled with ecstasy at the intimations with which all the world is pregnant. The world literally changes for any and everyone as the state of his consciousness changes. But, secondly, the man will change as he becomes more or less able to be conscious of the things in question, and as their limits recede he will himself expand. To take another example: if a symphony be played before a large audience there will be some to whom it is quite simply an arrangement of notes and nothing further. To others it will be a supreme exercise of technical skill both on the part of the musicians and on the part of the composer: the consciousness will be such that the technique stands out clearly where to the first group it passed unnoticed. And there will be yet others to whom the symphony will represent the intimate thoughts and emotions of the composer at the time of his writing it: their consciousness will be of a kind which will be perhaps unable to remember two successive bars when the performance is finished, or to recollect whether the technique were good or bad, but it will have been able to be affected by what was in fact the vital feature of the composition. Supposing that the same symphony is performed under the same circumstances after the lapse of some years, during which one of the first group of hearers has considerably increased his power of appreciating music, the mark of his difference from his former state will be in his ability to be conscious of what before he



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was unconscious of: in his power to feel the message which lies behind the music, to which he was formerly deaf. The limitations to which his consciousness submits, that is, are the only limits of the man.

It is quite clear that this change will not be merely an expansion of the consciousness, if the idea of expansion connote a widening of the field only. It is a question of kind rather than content. The increased consciousness will not be one in which a larger number of objects is present, nor one in which there is a set of objects entirely different from those present in the more limited consciousness, but one in which any and every object is experienced in a manner entirely different from that of the more limited consciousness. It is a question of holding more fully than before all that it does contain; it is not a change as regards the quantity, but as regards the quality of its comprehension. It is less an expansion than an intensification of the consciousness—a power of piercing through the apparent to the real which lies behind.

The passage from man to the divine is, then, a passage across intervening states of consciousness: the stages of the soul's progress are stages of consciousness in God. To those for whom one aspect of God is pre-eminently the Real Self it is a matter of growth in intensification of consciousness from man as he is, the dwelling-place of deity, to that which he must become, a being co-conscious with Christ of God. The classifications of Mystical Theology are according to the degree of intensity with which the mystic becomes conscious of Him, from the dim intimation of the Prayer of Quiet, through the incredible sweetness of Ecstasy to the active rest of the Spiritual Marriage wherein the consciousness is continual and complete. It may be that there is none to whom some consciousness of God is not given during his life, even though it be uncomprehended or put aside, but the mystics are they especially



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who have become capable of such a consciousness that its increase constitutes the sole purpose of their lives. The beginning of the process will be a modification of the normal consciousness, by which the values of life are changed, and That which dwells eternally in man calls to him with a voice which cannot finally be silenced, to cleanse himself of all that stands between him and It. The continuation will be such a self-naughting, such a suppression of all the claims of the self-hood, that the consciousness is progressively freed from that which hinders it, and is enabled by its intensification to know more and more of That which is its real life. As the process continues there will ever be less of the I and more and more of God in the consciousness, until the state is reached when it is filled with the knowledge of God entirely to the exclusion of everything that is less. When man is joined to God, that is, the Union occurs in the consciousness and is in no sense a thing outside it: there is evidently no question of travelling to any place or any plane, but a question of becoming something which is capable of realizing that which is eternally at hand. But Union must itself give place to Unity—that which is at last joined to the God within must ultimately reach a state in which it is conscious of all of which He is conscious, and no more have the consciousness that it stands in any way outside Him, even though the two be joined with unbreakable bonds. The Lover becomes the Beloved and the Beloved becomes the Lover: there is no longer a bond between them, because they are one. It is a mystery of universality to which the mind cannot reach, and must content itself with the belief that, on the analogy of widening or intensifying consciousness which has held throughout the process, the state of Unity will be one in which the consciousness of man will become actually the consciousness of God. If the command to be perfect as He is perfect is ever to be fulfilled,

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how can it be otherwise than by man being not only conscious of God, which implies yet the possibility of distinction, but conscious as God is conscious? Has not the soul immortality as its heritage, and can it everlastingly continue in the comparative separation of Union (if the phrase may be employed to denote that by which it falls short of Unity)?

It will be seen that the postulation of God as indwelling is the natural starting point for the type of mind and temperament which is under consideration, but that the intellectual subscription to the belief has to give way to an actual knowledge. To those, if there be such, who identify man with his bodily part the statement is obviously meaningless, and it is little more to any who hold that his intellect is the crown of his being. But to those who can find place in man for spirit, the statement is pregnant with signification. For them the spirit will be that aspect of God which is indwelling: the spirit will be that inexhaustible source of light of which the mystic finally becomes conscious, and for some of them the spirit will be Christ. They will understand, though it be but intellectually, how it is that Christ is crucified continually in them until they be offered willingly to Christ; how the True Self is in bondage until the false self be disowned. They too will have begun by saying "God is within," and they, or some of them, will have been joined to the universal brotherhood of mystics whose consciousness has become able to exchange statement for living knowledge. As the finer shades of beauty in a picture are only visible to those whose senses have become refined, they will have learned that the finer shades of reality are hidden from those who are enwrapped in the swathings of the self. They will have realized by experience that the only refining of the spiritual senses is that which comes by a rigorous purification and an unceasing denial of all the self-centred tendencies, and that all

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cleansing, as all life, must therefore be undertaken in love. And perhaps, to some of them, to live will be Christ, not as an ideal, but as an actual fact of consciousness.

But the lifelong pursuit of a state of consciousness bears a character which renders it little fitted for a supreme ideal. It has something of vagueness and abstraction which fails in its appeal to the impassioned lover of the Absolute that is the mystic: it is touched with coldness where it should be suffused with warmth, and its very impersonality, essential though it be, reduces its power of attraction. The goal is therefore clothed in all the pageantry of symbolism which may make the strongest appeal, and it has been seen that no variety has been neglected which may attract every kind of temperament. To those who are spurred to action by the glamour of chivalry, the High Quest of the Most Holy Graal will offer a *mise en scene* worthy of their devotion: they will be the Knights of God for whom the world is a perpetual tourney, whose whole purpose is the glory of their King. His renown will be their guerdon, and His love their impulse. To those for whom all heights are in themselves an irresistible attraction, the intervening states of consciousness will be the rugged ascents and the places of rest on the sides of the Mountain of God: the final consciousness will be the freedom and the glory of the summit. To one it is the gold which comes from the furnace of purification, to another it is the pearl which is found beneath the waves of the sea of selfhood: it is the House which is built and the consciousness of God inhabiting it: the moment when the Lover and the Beloved are inseparably one. And for countless numbers to whom the figure of Jesus Christ is the one supreme appeal, the whole body of emotions and desires will be centred round Him, and all their aspirations will tend to Him alone. But finally it will be not to the Divine Man Who lived and was crucified in Palestine, but to the God

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indwelling Who is to be found in their inmost hearts, and known only when a certain state of consciousness is reached. And maybe, in the ultimate analysis, it will be said that there is not only a state of intensified consciousness in which He is known, but a state of consciousness which is He.



## Chapter Sixteen



THE INTERIOR SIDE OF ST. FRANCIS' life, without considering for the moment his active ministry among his brethren and in the world, had God for its sole purpose and its end.

It is by virtue of this being his unswerving aim that he is fitly ranked among the mystics: with any lesser purpose in view he might well be acclaimed as a reformer, as the bearer of a new inspiration into the failing life of Catholicism, as an overwhelming force for betterment in his own time and those which followed him, even as a saint, but he could not be regarded as a mystic. The members of "The Open Secret Society of the Mystics" hold as their common watchword, "God is within"; and St. Francis, in his subscription to this belief and his search for what it implies, may take his place in their highest ranks.

It was not in his nature to erect an extensive structure of doctrine, both because he was awake to the dangers of an uninspired intellectualism and because the system which he inherited from the Church was his natural belief. He only added to it, intensified it, or departed from it, when it fell short of, or came into conflict with, what his own spiritual experience taught him to be essential. But it is on account of this attitude, and on account also of the fact that he rarely indulged in definite interpretation or application of the accepted beliefs, that there has been preserved peculiarly little which can throw any direct light upon his views.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A little book exists with the title of *Doctrine spirituelle de St. François*, by Père Appolinaire (Paris, 1878), but proves, disappointingly enough, to be no more than a series of extracts (including some of dubious authenticity) from St. Francis' published writings.



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What there is is by way of implication rather than direct statement, and has to be extracted from the mass of documents recording the incidents of his life and from the few remains of his own writings.

From this emerges with exceptional clearness the belief that the Higher and Real Self of man is divine. His vitalization of the statement in Genesis has already been noticed in passing:<sup>1</sup> it takes the form of an exhortation intended to produce humility by a contrast between man as he is essentially and as he is, in most cases, actually. "Consider, O man, how great the excellence in which the Lord has placed you because He has created and formed you to the image of His beloved Son according to the body and to His own likeness according to the Spirit. And all the creatures that are under heaven serve and know and obey their Creator in their own way better than you. And even the demons did not crucify Him, but you together with them crucified Him and still crucify Him by taking delight in vices and sins."<sup>2</sup> The passage insists and rests on the supposition of man's divinity, for the essential part of him—the spiritual part—is already like to God, only by his wilfulness it is continually hidden. It is a privilege which invests man with a higher responsibility than that of other created things, which are not regarded as being potentially conscious of the spirit; and while they serve God within their own means and limits it rests with man to know and to show forth the divine fact. Until he does so his divinity is not only obscured but suffers crucifixion in its bondage, and sin is precisely that which prolongs this captivity by encouraging the human part—the self-centred tendencies—to the detriment of the spiritual. But in St. Francis' symbolism the spirit could not be regarded as a possession common to everyone. On any hypothesis

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Admonition 5 (*Writings*, p. 10).



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it must have been conceived as universally indwelling, but only as a potential and not as an actual possession. It needed an effort, a desire, on the part of the individual to make the treasure his, to bring it into his consciousness, and without such a desire to receive it, it could not be regarded as being entrusted to him. Without it man could live, it is true, but lived incomplete and unfulfilled. For St. Francis this condition was represented by the unbeliever, and with his passionate enthusiasm for what was to him the one true faith such an expression would be the equivalent of the unregenerate—of those who had not come to the new birth of the spirit. A superficial acceptance of a creed would not, for him, have constituted belief; his nature demanded an intimate realization and not a cold concurrence of opinion. And it was by such a birth that the highest part of man was called to life, and man thereby came into his own. He insisted on this view of man's constitution, by an obvious implication if not expressly, when he felt that the praises of the people constituted a danger. "If the Giver," he would say, "should ever choose to take away what He has lent, the body and soul would alone remain, and these even the unbeliever possesses."<sup>1</sup> To awake this Dweller in the Innermost from the enchanted sleep into which it had been thrown by the lower part was thus the office of belief, and St. Francis recognized fully that, even when this awakening had been accomplished, the efforts must not be relaxed lest sleep should return.

To St. Francis this spirit which was "lent by the Giver," was inevitably Christ. Just as his whole life was shaped according to the model of Christ both without and within, so was it centred on the knowledge of Him in his heart, and it is this realization that the essential thing is the

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 133; *Mirror*, xlv.

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interior Christ which stands as a vitalizing complement to his outward imitation. Here again the mystical esoteric conception is behind and beside the exoteric, and gives it a more real and intimate life. When his illness prevented him from going among the people and preaching to them in his usual manner, he addressed a long letter to all the Christians in the whole world, which was to recall them to a sense of their duties and dedications. In it he speaks of those who give themselves over to the world, with its desires and cares and solitudes, in the same way as he speaks of the unbelievers in the passage already quoted. "They have no spiritual wisdom," he says, "for they have not in them the Son of God who is the true wisdom of the Father."<sup>1</sup> Here the source of all real wisdom is the spirit which is within; and it is the direct gift of God, and God, when He is incarnated in man, is represented by Christ. When St. Francis says that to have within them the Son of God is to have the wisdom of the spirit, there is no room left for doubt that Christ and the spirit were to him synonymous. He adds that it is bitter to serve God because all sin proceeds from the heart of man, as it is said in the Gospel, and thus emphasizes the contrast between the higher part and the lower.

The way to the knowledge of this indwelling spirit which seemed to him to be most natural and effective, was the way that mysticism has counselled throughout all the ages of its history. The command "know thyself," with the implication that in such knowledge will be found also the knowledge of God, does not rest, as at first sight it would appear to, on a paradox, but on the conception of the two selves which exist in man. On the one hand, if there be included in his constitution a divine part, it will assuredly unveil itself to search undertaken in the proper spirit; on

<sup>1</sup> Letter to All the Faithful (*Writings*, p. 106).



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the other, a clear knowledge of the shortcomings of the false self may lead to such a revulsion that the True Self will be the only and inevitable refuge. In either case, or in both, to know oneself leads to the desirable end. To St. Francis the true philosopher was he to whom nothing was of greater importance than the life eternal of the spirit, and he believed that the Scriptures contained the basis of a self-revelation which would infallibly bring this in its train. Anyone who would apply himself thereto, not presumptuously as though pretending to expound its mysteries, but humbly and with a genuine desire for illumination, would attain without difficulty, he held, from the knowledge of himself to the knowledge of God.<sup>1</sup>

But St. Francis' symbolism of the interior Christ was not restricted to the statement that He was within, and an essential part of man. Something even more intimate, more vivid, was necessary, and he had recourse to the symbols which take the human relationships for their basis. As such they have an immediate and evident appeal to everyone, for they rest neither on abstruse learning nor on a power of imagination, but on the common conditions of the life of every day, and so connote to each individual a series of ideas with which he is already acquainted. It is, then, in the Letter to All the Faithful that he explains his view of man's relation to Christ, and he introduces his subject with an exhortation to his readers to be desirous of serving rather than of commanding. On such as do this, realizing their own worthlessness and preserving their simplicity, the spirit of God shall rest—a view which implies yet again that the spirit is estranged from those who follow the opposite course. But not only shall it rest upon them, but literally dwell within them and invest them with the sonship of God: it is the indwelling which constitutes them children

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 102.

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of the Father, in contradistinction to the unregenerate. And by this sonship they are the spouses, the brothers, and the mothers of Christ. This combined relationship is not, however, to be taken, even symbolically, as occurring simultaneously. It represents a progression in sanctity, and the three relationships stand for a series of advancing degrees of intimacy. The relationship which comes first in the order of the symbolism is that of motherhood. Here the idea is the equivalent of that awakening from sleep which constitutes the first dim and partial entry of the spirit into the consciousness: it is the birth which must precede the ability to act. And in speaking of this birth St. Francis mentions the conditions and the attitude which make it possible: we are the mothers of Christ, he says, when we bear Him in our heart and in our body through pure love and a clean conscience—it is the predisposition that is necessary to bring even His conception within the range of possibility. We bring Him forth when this indwelling presence finds its way into activity through the work which we do, which should stand as an example to the surrounding world of the potency of the spirit. But the bringing to birth of Christ is the beginning only of the divine process. There follows it, in St. Francis' symbolism, the relationship which may be taken as typifying that which will best withstand the stress and strain of working in the world. As the child will leave his mother to go out to his own life, so by a reversal of the symbol, man is taken to pass from the position of the mother of Christ to that of His brother when in his progress through the world he does the will of God. It is the relationship of joint action, following on that of protection, and the common Fatherhood is realized in common service and obedience. But the final stage is represented by a degree of intimacy far greater than that of brotherhood—one that is only comparable to the ideal relationship of mother and child, and

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yet surpasses it by being the willing union of two responsible agents. St. Francis used the symbol of marriage to denote the highest state in which there is still the possibility of relationship, before a fusion has taken place which renders further distinction impossible. Of such a marriage there can be no description, and St. Francis says simply that man is the spouse of Christ when the faithful soul is united to Him by the Holy Ghost. This is the final identification of the soul of man with that spirit which is his own high self, and the marriage is celebrated within.<sup>1</sup>

It would be impossible to speak of the utility of the spirit, for the spirit is its own utility, but it may be of interest to gain some idea of St. Francis' view of the office of the spirit when it had entered in some degree into the consciousness. Beyond the spiritual wisdom which it has already been spoken of as conferring, he considered it to be the sense, as it were, by which God is seen. He quotes the conversation between Christ and Philip, when the latter asked that the Father might be shown to them, and the reply was given: "Have I been so long a time with you and have you not known Me? He that seeth Me seeth My Father also." He quotes from St. John again that no *man* has seen God at any time, and adds: "Because God is a spirit, therefore it is only by the spirit He can be seen." Coming in this context, just after the assurance that God is seen in and through Christ, the passage offers another testimony to St. Francis' belief that the spirit was Christ. The office of the spirit is then (if the phrase be permitted) to cognize Deity, and in the later passages of the same Admonition he gave an example of the manner in which such cognizance operated. Speaking of the way in which those who partake of the Sacrament unworthily, eat and drink judgment to themselves, he adds that it is only

<sup>1</sup> See Letter to All the Faithful (*Writings*, p. 104).

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those in whom the Spirit of the Lord dwells who receive the most holy Body and Blood of the Lord. "All others who do not have this same Spirit, and who presume to receive Him, eat and drink judgment to themselves."<sup>1</sup> They are not, it will be observed, debarred from partaking of the Bread and the Wine, but it will be in effect only bread and wine that they receive, and in no sense the Body and Blood of Christ. It is improbable that this is a limitation of the orthodox view of Transubstantiation, concocted by St. Francis himself, but it is undeniably an application of that which lay behind the doctrine, in terms of the spiritual life that was communicated by it. The presence of the spirit in the consciousness was absolutely necessary to the reception of the species in any other sense than a merely formal one: on its presence depended the power to receive, with the Bread, the strength which it communicated, and, with the Wine, the life. It was the spirit receiving and cognizing and responding to what was non-existent to the senses, and gaining therefrom its spiritual nourishment. The spirit was therefore to St. Francis both the way to the divine goal and the goal itself—it was that through which God is communicated and seen, and also in some sense God. In it was the truth of all truths, and it was Truth; it was itself the Life of all lives, and eternally and supremely the one way by which it was possible for man to attain thereto.

It must be admitted that this teaching of the interior Christ almost inevitably sprang from a personal experience. If it be not the common doctrine of general Christianity, it is nevertheless that of Christian mysticism, but it is not a tenet that would receive a large amount of emphasis from those who knew it by hearsay only. The mystic is by way of insisting specially on those things which he knows, either

<sup>1</sup> Admonition I (*Writings*, pp. 6, 7).



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in part or in full, from his own experience, and not on any traditional belief, even though the tradition be that of his confrères in the spirit. Report or tradition, in fact, only finds its ultimate fulfilment for him when it has been made his own by actual participation in the life which lies behind it, and until this has occurred it must remain to a large extent sterile. St. Francis, it has been seen, is credited with having convinced himself in deed of whatever he preached to others,<sup>1</sup> and there seems no reason to suppose that his preaching of the interior Christ was an exception to this rule. It is, in fact, expressly stated in the *Fioretti* that he found Christ in the secret places of his soul, and though this be but the comment of a biographer, contained in what is admittedly a legend rather than a historically accurate account of the facts, it agrees so well with that which is rendered probable on other grounds that it may be accepted as having its origin in fact, and not merely in a pious desire for edification.<sup>2</sup> It is at any rate significant that it is referred to the later years of his life, during which alone it would be possible, and though it is mentioned before the fact of the Stigmata it falls within their period. In such circumstances the statement may well refer to the flashes of Union which Mystical Theology regards as preceding the continuous Union of the Spiritual Marriage, which final state seems incontrovertibly to have been initiated on the heights of Alvernia. And although the present concern be not to trace in detail the stages of St. Francis' spiritual life, it will not be out of place to glance at the evidence for his having realized the Divine Union which was the goal of all his desires.

It will be remembered that the Union is taken to consist in a state of consciousness in which the Deity indwelling is known, either fully, as at the end, or in part, as in the

<sup>1</sup> See p. 311.

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers* (First Consideration of the Most Holy Stigmata).



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stages immediately preceding the end. Like all spiritual progress its attainment rests on desire, and if all evidence for such a desire be lacking there can scarcely remain any hope of it having been reached. But St. Francis' case presents no difficulties in this respect. In the first place there are again, for what they are worth, the statements of his early biographers, and here it is evident that, while their accounts of his interior life must be received with caution, their reports of his desires had almost certainly a foundation in the yearnings to which they had themselves heard him give expression. Thus Thomas of Celano speaks of him as "longing above all things to be dissolved and to be with Christ." Did this sentence stand alone it might easily be a method, and a method quite after Celano's own heart, of referring to St. Francis' desire for death and his hope of knowing Christ thereafter. But it is followed by an account of the means he took with this end in view—of his struggle to be free from the entanglements of the world, of the way in which he withdrew into himself and substituted the thought of God for thoughts of the world of manifestation. It is followed also by a short account of his continual prayer—of that vital prayer which does not consist in words, but in the attitude of the creature towards his Creator, which for all mystics is the supreme means towards Union. "Walking, sitting, eating, and drinking, he was intent on prayer."<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, with his greater understanding of the mystical life and position, puts the matter somewhat differently, and more definitely. "He yearned to be utterly transformed into Him by the fire of his exceeding love," he says, and there could perhaps be no better words by which to express the mystic's universal desire.<sup>2</sup>

And in the second place, to supplement these reports,

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 71.

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, ix, 2.

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there has been preserved a prayer in which St. Francis poured out his longing for God. It is in effect a prayer for Union—for the approach of the purified soul to God, when it has realized its own inadequacy. "Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, give to us wretches to do for Thee what we know Thee to will and to will always that which is pleasing to Thee; so that inwardly purified, inwardly illumined and kindled by the flame of the Holy Ghost, we may be able to follow in the footsteps of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and by Thy grace alone come to Thee the Most High."<sup>1</sup> The prayer is a short résumé of the whole mystical process—a crescendo which begins with man's realization of his incompleteness while in the state of separation, then passes to the method of breaking down his barriers by substituting the divine will for his own, continues with a reference to the illumination and support of the divine spirit, and ends on a note of triumph with the tremendous assertion of the possibility of coming actually to God.

It was in prayer of the kind referred to above by Celano—"not prayer for one moment, not vacant and presumptuous prayer, but long-continued, full of devotion, calm and humble," as he says—that St. Francis found the way to Union. "In prayer there seemeth to be the gain and heaping up of graces . . . a cleansing of the inward feelings and an union with the one true and highest good. . . . In prayer we speak with God and hear Him, and live as it were the life of Angels," he said, when he was debating his proper manner of life,<sup>2</sup> and his biographies contain repeated accounts of its effects on him. He is spoken of as "striving ever to manifest a spirit present with God," as affirming "that the grace of prayerfulness should be more desired

<sup>1</sup> This prayer is placed by Father Robinson at the end of the Letter to all the Friars (*Writings*, p. 118).

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, xii, 1.

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than all others by the religious man," as being so absorbed in prayer "whether walking or sitting, within doors or without, in toil or at leisure . . . that he seemed to have devoted thereunto not only his whole heart and body, but also his whole labour and time." "He experienced in prayer . . . the longed-for presence of the Holy Spirit" and therein "spake familiarly with his Lord," and the essence of all the accounts is that by means of prayer "he became changed almost into another man."<sup>1</sup> They refer chiefly, it will be readily conceded, to interior or mental prayer, to the wordless contemplation which is an intensification of an attitude which should be continued, but St. Francis' prayer was not restricted to this. His fervour, it has been remarked in his prayer for Union, also broke out into words, and his remarkable paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer contains perhaps all the essentials of his mysticism.<sup>2</sup> It was a revitalization, springing from an interior comprehension, of phrases which are always in danger of becoming dulled by centuries of repetition, and an interpretation of them above all in the interests of the interior life. It runs as follows:

"Our Father, most holy, our Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter.

"Who art in heaven, in the angels and in the saints illuminating them unto knowledge, for Thou, O Lord, art light; inflaming them unto love, for Thou, O Lord, art love; dwelling in them and filling them with blessedness, for Thou, O Lord, art the highest Good, the eternal Good from whom is all good and without whom is no good.

"Hallowed be Thy Name: may Thy knowledge shine

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, x, 1, 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> "It is a work," remarks M. Sabatier, "which does not fail to enlighten us on the mystical ardours of St. Francis" (*Examen de quelques travaux récents*, Op. Crit. Hist., fasc. x).

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in us that we may know the breadth of Thy benefits, the length of Thy promises, the height of Thy majesty, and the depth of Thy judgments.

“Thy Kingdom come, that Thou mayest reign in us by grace and mayest make us come to Thy Kingdom, where there is the clear vision of Thee, the perfect love of Thee, the blessed company of Thee, the eternal enjoyment of Thee.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that we may love Thee with the whole heart by always thinking of Thee; with the whole soul by always desiring Thee; with the whole mind by directing all our intentions to Thee and seeking Thy honour in all things and with all our strength, by spending all the powers and senses of body and soul in the service of Thy love and not in anything else; and that we may love our neighbour even as ourselves, drawing to the best of our power all to Thy love; rejoicing in the good of others as in our own and compassionating them in troubles and giving offence to no one.

“Give us this day, through memory and understanding and reverence for the love which He had for us and for those things which He said, did, and suffered for us—our daily bread, Thy Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

“And forgive us our trespasses, by Thy ineffable mercy in virtue of the Passion of Thy Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the merits and intercession of the most Blessed Virgin Mary and of all Thy elect.

“As we forgive them that trespass against us, and what we do not fully forgive, do Thou, O Lord, make us fully forgive, that for Thy sake we may truly love our enemies and devoutly intercede for them with Thee; that we may render no evil for evil, but in Thee may strive to do good to all.

“And lead us not into temptation, hidden or visible, sudden or continuous.

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"But deliver us from evil, past, present, and to come. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

Such a prayer needs no comment. It may simply be noted that the Kingdom is regarded as an interior state—a state of consciousness—in which God may be seen and known, and that our daily bread is the *Panis Supersubstantialis* of the Vulgate, and none other than Christ Himself.

And as to St. Francis' actual attainment of the Union, there are passages in the biographies which leave no room for doubt. For him it was the consciousness of Christ, and he admitted to his intimate companions that he felt Him "almost continually present before his eyes."<sup>2</sup> In the language of Mystical Theology this was a continuing intellectual vision, of a kind which is enjoyed almost exclusively by those who have reached a high stage of Union.<sup>3</sup> It may be compared with the experience of St. Teresa recorded in her *Life*. "Jesus Christ seemed to be by my side continually. . . . I had a most distinct feeling that He was always on my right hand, a witness of all I did; and never at any time, if I was but slightly recollected, or not too much distracted, could I be ignorant of His near presence."<sup>4</sup> She adds, in speaking in the *Interior Castle* of the same incident, that the vision may last for days or even a year, which latter period is nearer the facts in the case of St. Francis.<sup>5</sup> Similarly an incident occurred during the period towards the end of his life when he was continually suffering, which provided him with an opportunity for an actual statement of the Union. To console him in his pain one of his companions suggested that he should have

<sup>1</sup> *Writings*, pp. 139-41.

<sup>2</sup> Bonaventure, ix, 2.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Devine, *A Manual of Mystical Theology*, pp. 549, 550; Scaramelli, *Il Direttorio Mistico*, tratt. iv, cap. ix, sec. 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Life*, xxvii, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, viii, 3.



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recourse to the Scriptures, knowing the consolation that he habitually extracted from them. But St. Francis answered simply that it was good to read the Scriptures and seek out God in them, but that he himself had already mastered so much of them that he had an ample store for meditation. And then he added the fact that was supreme and central and final for him: "I need no more, my son: I know Christ, the poor man crucified."<sup>1</sup> Against this solemn assurance, made by one to whom exaggeration was abhorrent and impossible, no doubts can prevail. It is the assertion of the knowledge of the spirit, couched in terms of the spirit's suffering in man. When Bonaventure, therefore, in that part of his work on the progress of the soul to God which treats of the Union, cites St. Francis as one who passed into God by ecstasy—"a mystic and very hidden operation which none knows except he who receives it, nor any receives except he who desires it"—he must be regarded as stating a literal and incontrovertible fact.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Itinerarius mentis in Deum*, chap. vii.



## Chapter Seventeen

**S**INCE THE SPIRIT IS UNIVERSAL IT IS both ubiquitous and the very essence of life. In man, it has been seen, it is the true self for the mystic, and for the Christian mystic it is Christ—as the Spirit of God in Its incarnation. It is both the life of Him and the way to that life. It is the very centre of his hope, as it is the centre of his being, because he knows it to be the object of his whole quest brought within his reach. But there is another side to the spirit's universality. The immanence of God in man is not exclusive of, but parallel to, the immanence of God in nature, as the whole doctrine of immanence is not exclusive of, but parallel to, that of transcendence. And though it is impossible to deny, or rationally to discuss, the ultimate possibility of a knowledge of God in His transcendence, it is evidently by a knowledge of Him in immanence that such knowledge will, if ever, be approached. Similarly, it will appear that a realization of the immanence in nature will depend inevitably on some measure of realization of the immanence in the individual himself.

The form in which this belief appears in certain of the mystics is that God is the one real and universal Substance. This rather surprising word is used in the literal rather than in the common sense of modern speech; it is used to convey the idea of that which stands behind and underlies everything, rather than, necessarily, that of which everything is composed. He is the Substance, however, in the sense that He is necessary to the being of all things, He is

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that without which nothing could be, and if He could be conceived as withdrawing Himself for one fantastic moment, everything would inevitably cease to be. To say that all depends on Him, then, is simply the fact, since He is its upholder. The unknown author of the *Theologia Germanica* regards this belief as the foundation of all others, and places it accordingly at the beginning of his teaching. "That which is perfect," he says, "is a Being, who hath comprehended and included all things in Himself and His own Substance, and without whom, and beside whom, there is no true Substance, and in whom all things have their Substance. For He is the Substance of all things. . . ." He is then faced with the difficulty that there are some things which seem palpably to be not God—things which are regarded as flowing out from the real Substance. Are not these, it is asked, something beside it—do they not prove that there *is* a something else as well as what was claimed to be the unique Substance of all? The answer is that such things are not the *true* Substance: they are in the nature of accidents rather than essentials, they are manifestations, visible appearances which are no Substance, yet owe whatever they have or are to the real Substance underlying them. If this standpoint be accepted, it follows in the first place that the world as it appears to man's physical eyes is unreal: his view of it is superficial and is concerned with an appearance in place of a reality. It is in a sense a shadow world, a world of phantasms, an impalpable dream-world which has yet taken on an aspect of solid actuality. The world as he normally knows it is a film thrown over reality, a reflection, a brightness which, as the *Theologia* puts it, "hath no Substance except in the fire whence the brightness flowed forth, such as the sun or a candle."<sup>1</sup> And it follows in the second place that just

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. i.

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because it depends for its very existence on the divine Substance beneath it, it is in some way shaped and moulded on that Substance, and becomes actually a theophany or appearance of God.<sup>1</sup>

But the idea of God as that which underlies is not limited to the upholding and causing to exist of the physical world alone, any more than the idea of immanence is limited to immanence in the individual man. The whole of creation, the entirety of all that is manifested, with all its thoughts, activities, and growth, its beginning, its continuation, and its end, is real only in God and finds its meaning alone in Him. "God is the Being of all that are, and the Life of all that live, and the Wisdom of all the wise; for all things have their being more truly in God than in themselves, and also all their powers, knowledge, life, and the rest."<sup>2</sup> And Coventry Patmore's vivid phrase puts the position to the reason: "Creation differs from subsistence only as the first leap of a fountain differs from its continuance."<sup>3</sup>

Now the point of importance is the oneness of the underlying spirit which is God. In it is the mystic's solution of the problem of the One and the Many—the Unity is the reality which only awaits comprehension, and the Multiplicity is that by which the normal view of it is conditioned. There *is* only One—there appear to be so many that the mind fails even to enumerate them. That which, by the mystic's hypothesis, is within and is the supreme heritage of man, is likewise in all else that exists. But this is not all. From the essential oneness of the spirit it results that it is ultimately incapable of division, and therefore that what is

<sup>1</sup> The use of any spatial terms such as "behind" or "beneath" is undesirable, because the idea of space is not itself applicable to the spirit, but it seems unavoidable in the present connection.

<sup>2</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. xxxvi.

<sup>3</sup> The Rod, the Root, and the Flower (*Aurea Dicta*, lii).

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found in it in one place is found in it in all places. If the simile of division may be employed for a moment, it may be said that each part of it contains and is equal to the whole, so that what is true of any part of it is true of it in its entirety, and conversely what is true of the entirety is true of any part. Or again, to be fully conscious in the spirit is to know all the spirit everywhere, and not only any supposed part of it which is in the individual. The Lady Julian of Norwich brings this point out plainly. "In mankind that shall be saved," she says, "is comprehended all: that is to say, all that is made and the Maker of all. For in man is God, and God is in all."<sup>1</sup> And again: "God dwelleth in our soul and . . . our soul dwelleth in God," where she draws attention not only to the immanence in the individual, but to the universality of that by which the soul is ultimately surrounded. For she continues to the effect that that in which the soul dwells is God's substance, "of which Substance, God, we are that we are." It is again God as that which underlies regarded as the means by which man exists: the Real as the Substance of all appearances. To her intuitive sight God and man's Substance were one and the same thing, but her rational understanding, with its unfailing tendency towards division, caused her to regard them as two. "I saw no difference between God and our Substance: but as it were all God; and yet mine understanding took that our Substance is in God: that is to say, that God is God, and our Substance is a creature in God." And then she throws aside all reasoning and analysis, and cries in a rapture of certainty the whole amazing truth of her knowledge: "We are enclosed in the Father, and we are enclosed in the Son, and we are enclosed in the Holy Ghost. And the Father is enclosed in us, and the Son is enclosed in us, and

<sup>1</sup> *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. ix.



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the Holy Ghost is enclosed in us: Almighty, All-Wisdom, All-Goodness: one God, one Lord."<sup>1</sup> Interpretation cannot belittle or commentary explain away the tremendous claim of God both without and within contained in such a phrase.

Nor is there any question as to the identity, in the Lady Julian's view, between that which stands behind and the spirit in man. The latter word is used only once in all the *Revelations*, when she speaks of the goods given by God in our spirit alone, and the context demands (and the editor points out) that it should mean Substance. For Lady Julian goes on to speak of the goods that we receive, and explains that they come into the Sense Soul out of the riches of our nature-Substance, and that, it has been seen, is God.<sup>2</sup> Spirit, Substance, and the immanent God are therefore interchangeable terms, in Lady Julian's phraseology, for one universal thing.

The same conception is present in the doctrines held and taught by St. Catherine of Genoa, though there it takes a slightly different form. Instead of being the Substance, God is regarded as "the whole essence of things both visible and invisible,"<sup>3</sup> so that the idea of a spirit which underlies all things gives place to that of a force which vivifies them. The change is one of words rather than of attitude, as it amounts to a simile taken from the terms of life in place of one taken from the terms of space. The fundamental conception remains unchanged, that, namely, of the one universal which is found in all things and gives them all their meaning. The Essence of St. Catherine is as ubiquitous, as inevitable, as necessary, as continuous as the Substance of Lady Julian and the *Theologia Germanica*.

Now the implications of this position are clear. If the

<sup>1</sup> *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. liv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chaps. lvi and lvii.

<sup>3</sup> Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, p. 266.

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spirit be in some sense resident in man, and resident also in all things created, there is thus formed a link between them which cannot be broken. Their apparent separation is an illusion, but an illusion which has all the force of reality for those who live under its influence. For to those who live in a valley separated from its neighbours by a mountain range which they cannot scale, any idea of the similarity and the essential oneness of the world outside will seem the most obvious flight of fancy. But if one of them, by superhuman force and energy, make the laborious ascent and stand at last on the apparently unattainable summit, he will see therefrom not only the immensity which surrounds him, but the inevitable oneness of it all with the valley which he has left. His report of such oneness, if he return below to give account of it, will hardly gain credence among those whose natural protest would be that they had ocular, and therefore satisfactory, demonstration of the fact of the valley's separateness. Any attempt on the part of the mountaineer to explain the reality would naturally be received as contrary to the obvious and accepted laws, and excused only on the ground that the adventurer's words were due to some inexplicable madness of the heights. Or, if the simile of that which underlies is to be adhered to strictly, the case is comparable with that of a people who, on seeing that the stems of a plant emerged separately from the ground, came to the conclusion that each stem constituted a plant in itself. The level earth would be the final fact, in itself sacrosanct and evident. To conceive of an underlying root in which all the stems came together, from which, in fact, they all sprang, would be impossible, because the evidences of all the senses would be against such a supposition. And if one, greatly daring, disturbed the obvious foundations of life and discovered the oneness of all the stems, he would be able to convince his companions only by inducing them to

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make the same experiment for themselves. So the mystic, rising to the apex of his being, or journeying down to the very ground of his existence, discovers that which is common to all being in every place.

The realization of this essential oneness of the world is thus conditional on some degree of, or some approach to, Union with the indwelling spirit. On the hypothesis, God is everywhere, but more especially and pre-eminently within, and this being within must stand for the most evident opportunity of knowledge of Him. It is, as it were, an offer made to man by means of which the need of going outwards to see Him is obviated: He is thereby closer and more nearly related to man than if He were only in all the world outside of him. For He is the Being of his being, the Life of his life, the Self of his self. But there are degrees of Union, varying stages of the ability to be conscious of the spirit within. There are preliminary states in which the consciousness is less complete, less vivid, than in those which follow them; the vision is still clouded and limited by the action of the remnants of the lower or self-seeking tendencies. The progress towards the full vision of the Spiritual Marriage is a progress in clearness of spiritual sight—a continual tearing aside of veils. And correspondently to this increasing penetration there is a progress in the continuity with which the consciousness is retained. At first it is intermittent as well as dim, it comes for a time and illumines all the world, and then goes as suddenly and inexplicably—it must sometimes seem—as it came. Then, as the mystic becomes more and more purged of his separating self, the flashes extend into appreciably longer periods, during which the consciousness of God is unbroken. Again there are times of fluctuation, when the consciousness is never entirely extinguished, but varies between the neighbourhood of non-existence and the full flame of knowledge.

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And as the final state stands for the unclouded vision, so it stands also for complete and finally unbroken continuity. At this point God is never wholly absent from the consciousness, there is no barrier left, and the only variation is according to the entirety with which the soul is turned to Him. Such is the testimony of the mystics.

Since all spirit is one spirit, the consciousness of this world of oneness will vary with the clearness with which it is realized in its immanence in the individual. As the latter increases or decreases, so will the former gain or lose in intensity, and the final and continuous establishment of the one will be accompanied by the ultimate sealing of the other. The emphasis, it is true, will not always be upon them both equally, because to each individual there is his own particular appeal, and as there are some for whom the idea of the God within has no great meaning, there are some also who would shrink from the conception of God in nature. In the one class may be, perhaps, those who find it difficult to accept anything which is touched, however remotely, by the associations of Christian ways of thinking and modes of expression, and in the other those who fear lest they may be led unknowing into the, to them, forbidden realms of pantheism. It is scarcely necessary to add that both the dislike and the fear are groundless, since the teaching of the indwelling spirit has no kind of connection with the more repellent limitations of the churches' dogmas, and the conception of the divine immanence in nature in no way rules out that of the supreme transcendence of God.

For the mystics who have been cited above, this oneness of all spirit, and its inevitable implications, were evident. If that which is apparent be but a projection of the spirit, and the spirit be its real ground and reality, the relationship between all created things must follow. The vivid and actual realization of the one must mean the vivid and actual realization of the other, and the human conception of



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brotherhood will take on a new degree of actuality. It will no longer be a dream of which fulfilment is desired, however passionately, or sought, however earnestly, by persuasion or arrangement, for its realization in any stable sense will be seen to depend on penetration into the spiritual sphere. And, seen therefrom, the relation of all the separate parts of the manifested world with each other will be in a particularly literal sense one of brotherhood, for they are all children of one spirit—members of a family whose Father is incontrovertibly known to be divine. With St. Catherine of Genoa the spirit was pictured as the one centre which was found everywhere. "The one true divine root-centre of her individual soul," writes her biographer, "is ever, at the same time, experienced and conceived as present, in various degrees and ways, simply everywhere, and in everything." It is the centre through which all things are related, in spite of their apparent difference and separateness on an illusory circumference. It is the meeting-point of all, their "universal bond and brotherhood."<sup>1</sup> In some the spirit can shine through and act with almost unbounded efficacy, in others it is clouded and limited, as it were, by the heaviness and strain of its surroundings, but in all things it is and all things it vivifies, however it be obscured.

The Lady Julian uses an almost identical metaphor. In one of her revelations she speaks of seeing God in a Point, and because of her having so seen Him she realized that He was in all things. This point, then, is everywhere—"He is in the Mid-point of all thing"—and is the same thing as the centre was for St. Catherine.<sup>2</sup> But Lady Julian realized that the ability to see this was not the common possession of every man. It required a spiritual penetration of which doubtless she regarded every one as

<sup>1</sup> Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> *The Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xi.



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capable, but to which they had not all attained: it was the summit of experience as well as, in another sense, the foundation of all real activity. And besides being an ultimate necessity, it was a high privilege, "a worship to God," immeasurably higher than the ability to see Him in any special thing. Thus "the fulness of joy is to behold God in all," and the foundation of His so being was for her the sight of Him in a point.<sup>1</sup> But the universal Substance which made this possible, when she is using that metaphor, has been seen to be the immanent deity, and she quite frankly uses the word Christ as being the entirety of all real things. "I it am," the Figure spoke from the crucifix, "I it am that is highest, I it am that thou lovest, . . . I it am that thou meanest, I it am that is all."<sup>2</sup> Thus in her experience of the world which lies hid behind the present one did Lady Julian come to the realization of Christ eternally extended through the universe.

She saw, too, no less than St. Catherine, that in such a common Substance lay the unescapable necessity of brotherhood. That which underlay was in a sense there for each in particular, but in a much wider sense there for all. They were partakers in a common love, and indissolubly bound by it when once they had passed into its realization. For, she says, "it is God's will that I see myself as much bound [*i.e.*, beholden] to Him in love as if He had done for me all that He hath done; and thus should every soul think inwardly of its Lover. That is to say, the Charity of God maketh in us such a unity that, when it is truly seen, no man can part himself from other."<sup>3</sup> Thus brotherhood is then no longer a matter of desire, of goodwill, of charity in the sense of effort, but the natural and inevitable fact of spiritual comprehension: a condition

<sup>1</sup> *The Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. xxxv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. xxvi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. lxv.

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other than which nothing is possible. For the baptism of the spirit "blends them all into one blood" and the knowledge of Christ

"makes but one body of all souls,  
And love that body's soul."

Or as the *Theologia Germanica* puts it with its usual penetration and lucidity: "He who shall or will love God, loveth all things in One as All, One and All, and One in All as All in One; and he who loveth somewhat, this or that, otherwise than in the One, and for the sake of the One, loveth not God, for he loveth somewhat which is not God. . . . And when the true divine Light and Love dwell in a man, he loveth nothing else but God alone, for he loveth God as Goodness and for the sake of Goodness, and all Goodness as One, and One as All; for, in truth, All is One and One is All in God."<sup>1</sup>

So, then, for those on certain levels of consciousness there is a perpetual revelation of God in nature. The world becomes vividly a theophany, not in the way in which it may be said that a flower shows forth the sweetness and the beauty of God and the mountains show forth His everlasting strength, but by a conscious appreciation of the place of each thing that is, and of its office, in the underlying spiritual scheme. It is not a work of the imagination, piecing together the wonders of the world according to its fancy, but a work of comprehension on the part of that side of man which alone has free entry into the spiritual sphere. It is not fantasy, it is fact; and fact of a more superb reality than any that can be recognized by the senses. And, like all revelations, the revelation of the deity in nature is one which is an open secret to all who are capable of learning it.

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Germanica*, chap. xlvi.

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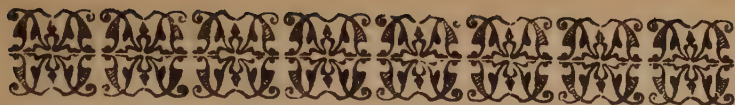
The condition of its discovery is the opening of the spiritual eyes, the cleansing of the spiritual sight by the destruction of the veils of self-hood which blind it. The immanent God is walled round and obscured by no other guards and concealments, He is entrenched behind no other fortifications, than those which are constituted by man's own incapacity. He is there—a gift ready for man's taking, inexhaustible and eternal. The revelation is thus a reveiling for some, a hiding behind the surface which they cannot pierce; it stands for a sanctuary which cannot be violated by those who are unworthy of it, because they cannot find its entrance. As St. Catherine knew, the heavenly world does not follow after, but lies behind the present world, and "the cleavage in the soul's life is not between things successive—between the Now and Then, and at the point of death; but between things simultaneous, between the This and That."<sup>1</sup> Heaven is there now and always, for heaven is there where is God, and God is not absent. Man does not go there, but becomes conscious of it—it comes to him, rather, as a sudden stupendous illumination of all he sees. For in his spirit man holds a master-key that can unlock the treasure of God everywhere, and at that moment he realizes with a certainty beyond discussion or disproof, that he is interpenetrated with God as a sponge with the waters of the sea. He knows himself surrounded and swathed and clothed with God—all he sees he sees in God, all that lives and is has its life and being in Him, and there is, in absolute fact, no void for ever. And at that time he is one with the wind and the stars, one with the beggar and the king; the stones and the trees and the sky are afire with the splendour of God. There is no estrangement, for there is understanding: no scorn, for there is love: no loss, for all is fulfilled with Him.

<sup>1</sup> Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. i, p. 238.

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But this is a matter for experience and not for conviction, it is to be known and not to be believed, for, in the words of one who knew as only the few have known, "God is more near to us than tongue can tell or heart can think."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Lady Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, chap. lxxii.



## Chapter Eighteen

**T**HE REVELATION WHICH THUS LIES hid in nature is, in its truest sense, a sacramental revelation, inasmuch as each detail of manifestation becomes an outward sign of a spiritual reality. The true life resides beneath the surface, but shows forth in and gives its form to that which may be known by the evidence of the senses. But there is a sacramentalism of the mind as well as a sacramentalism of the spirit. The consciousness may be affected through either of these channels, and the capacity to receive by means of them both may co-exist in the same individual. There is an attitude of mind in which everything that is seen conveys not merely its obvious message—the fact of its existence and certain connotations that have become attached to it as such—but also recalls other facts and a whole series of other connotations. It gives rise to a train of thought existing on other levels and concerned with other ends: the one thing, the given fact, *is* not in any sense that which it suggests, but stands for and is connected with it by an acquired, or sometimes it seems by a natural, relation. In the sacramentalism of the mind the outward sign is a reminder and a point of concentration of thoughts about the spiritual reality, but in no sense conveys either it or its graces. It symbolizes, but does not communicate.

Beside the deeper sacramentalism of St. Francis, which in time came to give to both him and his actions a character of peculiar sweetness and appeal, ran a vein of symbolism which is apparent not at one period only, but throughout



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his life. His mind was saturated with biblical similes, and, playing round the objects which he saw, it went back continually to that with which they were connected. The world thus became a perpetual reminder of the life which he so ardently desired to imitate, and of the final concern of man, in all his activities, with God. The figure of Christ as the Lamb appealed to him with especial force and poignancy, and with something of the thorough devotion and imaginativeness of a child he took every opportunity to honour the one in succouring the other. Thus on one occasion when he was walking through the country with one of his companions, he noticed a field in which was a large flock of goats. Among them was a small lamb, and St. Francis, to the astonishment of the brother, began to groan aloud. The sight recalled to him the image of Christ among the Pharisees and the chief priests, and made so pitiful an impression on him that he begged his companion to help him to save the lamb. With the help of a passing merchant they eventually succeeded in obtaining it, and proceeded, greatly comforted, to the neighbouring city, where they finally deposited it with the nuns at one of the convents.<sup>1</sup> If such an incident suggest an exaggerated tenderness or an over-delicate susceptibility, it marks also a simplicity and a genuine thoroughness which are sufficient in themselves to call for admiration. And this was not an isolated instance. At another time St. Francis met a man carrying two lambs, hanging bound over his shoulders, and asked him what he proposed doing with them. The owner replied that he was taking them to the market and that they would eventually be killed and eaten, whereat St. Francis protested passionately. He insisted on giving his cloak in exchange for the lambs, and then, as on the former occasion, he found himself somewhat

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 77, 78.



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embarrassed as to what to do with them. Evidently he could not go about the country accumulating an ever-increasing flock of sheep, so he finally arranged to give his purchases back to their original owner, on the condition that he should neither sell them nor hurt them, but look after them carefully at all times.<sup>1</sup>

Once, indeed, his tenderness for this image of Christ led him to what seems to be his only expression of hatred or even dislike towards any animal. He was staying in a monastery near Gubbio, and a newborn lamb was killed by what Celano describes as a "baleful sow." When St. Francis heard of this he was so incensed by that which seemed to him symbolically an outrage on the Lamb of God that he cursed the sow without mercy, and the biographer relates that it died three days later.<sup>2</sup> The incident is in itself, perhaps, of no great value, but it is interesting as an example of the way in which the sacramentalism of the mind falls short of that of the spirit, and occasionally overrides it. As a mental process it is subject to the errors which characterize all the definitely non-spiritual activities; it accepts division as its natural element, and lends itself to a quickness of condemnation, which, however consistent with the symbolism itself, is essentially foreign to the spirit. It rises and falls with the abilities and deficiencies of the mind; it may even, and that easily with a habit of loosely associative thinking, provide a palpably wrong conclusion; and in the case in question it led St. Francis to condemn, instead of remonstrating with, as he was quite capable of doing, what he would not have hesitated to call "my sister the sow."

This symbol-seeing attitude was universal with him. By a trick of the mind the visible world provided him with another and imaginary world filled with the objects of his

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 111; Bonaventure, viii, 6.

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adoration. The poet in him doubtless aided in this, with its natural tendency to construct images and draw parallels between the seen and the unseen, the known and the remembered, the actual and the ideal. It was a world furnished by his rich imagination and his deep devotion—a world, it would seem, that lay between the physically apparent and the spiritually real. It was a realm of fantasy in which the regents were tradition and love. The rocks over which he walked recalled Him Who had been called the Rock, and he would walk over them almost with fear and certainly with reverence because of the great figure with which they were associated in his mind. He would not have the whole garden dug up for growing vegetables, but instructed the brothers to leave parts of it so that the luxuriance of the grass and the fresh beauty of the wild flowers should show forth the everlasting beauty of God. In their return in the spring he saw the recurrent graciousness of deity, and the flowers themselves recalled, as the *Mirror of Perfection* puts it, “Him who is called the ‘flower of the field’ and ‘the lily of the valley.’” But he went farther than this, and had a plot of ground set aside on purpose for sweet-smelling herbs and all kinds of flowers, as a symbol of the Eternal Sweetness. There is something of universal appeal in the picture of this impassioned preacher, this unrelenting critic of evil, the founder of a world-wide Order, surrounding himself with fragrance in honour of the God Whom he preached and loved. It is the eternal child whose presence is a part of genius, and was less obscured in St. Francis than in many, manifesting in natural simplicity. And, as a child may do, he attributed to flowers and trees something of his own feelings. When the brothers were cutting down a tree, for example, he would not let them destroy it entirely, but made them leave at least the root so that it might have some hope of sprouting again. He pictured its complete annihilation



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with just a child's sorrow, but in addition seems to have felt that every tree demanded a certain reverence because of the reflected sanctity of the Cross. It was on the wood of a tree that he felt the salvation of humanity had been effected, and all trees therefore shared something of the Cross's splendour. But the sun was perhaps the especial object of his reverence. It was inevitable that he should connect it with the Sun of Righteousness, and it also stood for the might and the majesty and the daily care of God. It may well have been for him a symbol of the Light that enlightens every man, and he taught the brethren that the pageantry of its rising should be a sign for them to praise God. It was the symbol in chief of that from which all life came, of the joy and the brightness of all the days. He put it, therefore, in the forefront of the Praises of the Creatures:

“ Be Thou praised, my Lord, with all Thy creatures,  
Above all Brother Sun,  
Who gives the day and lightens us therewith.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,  
Of Thee, Most High, he bears similitude.”<sup>1</sup>

To a mind so imbued with the idea of symbolism and so intent on spiritual purity as that of St. Francis, certain things stood out naturally as precious beyond the rest. All that which cleansed, all that which purged, took on a particular value in his eyes: they stood for the means to the one end he desired. In the Praises of the Creatures water represents not only that which it does, its office, but that which it produces, its result. It is spoken of not only as the means of cleansing, but also as the purity to which such cleansing leads. It is that “which is most useful and humble and precious and pure,” and as such contained all the virtues that St. Francis prized most highly. And he

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 165; *Mirror*, cxviii-cxx.

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took it so vividly as representing the purification and the purity which he knew to be essential to the knowledge of God that, as on other occasions, he revered the symbol as well as the thing symbolized. He would never, therefore, when washing his hands, let the water fall where it could be trodden underfoot.<sup>1</sup> For fire his love was even greater than for water, and connects naturally with his reverence for the sun. He praised it both as giving light in the night time and in its aspect as a purifying medium, and here again speaks of it as representing that which it produces as well as that which it is. "He is beautiful and joyful and robust and strong," he sang,<sup>2</sup> and as such it seems to have symbolized the completion of the purification effected by water. It not only purged away the dross, but strengthened the spiritual gold—its action was more masculine, more positive, than that of water, and the two, he knew, were necessary for full strength. He went even to the length of refusing to extinguish it in any circumstances, influenced, it may be, in his anxiety to follow literally the example of Christ, by the recollection that Isaiah's prophecy had been held to refer to Him: "the smoking flax shall he not quench." One day when he was sitting near the fire it caught his clothes, and as he made no movement to put it out, the brethren who were with him ran to do so. But he forbade them to touch it, telling them not to harm the fire, and it was not till the Warden was called that it was finally extinguished. Similarly on one occasion on Monte Alvernia, when one of the cells caught fire, St. Francis would not help to put it out, and contented himself with rescuing a skin which he was in the habit of using at night. But even of this he repented afterwards, and refused to use the skin which he felt he had stolen from his brother the fire. For he held it to have been avarice

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, cxviii, cxx.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, cxx.

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on his part which had caused him to save the skin, and that he had unjustly cheated the fire of its due.<sup>1</sup>

As far as this unwillingness to extinguish any fire can be held to connect with its symbolism, it would seem to be its symbolism as the giver of light, rather than any other aspect of it, that he had in mind. For he exercised the same almost bizarre tolerance to a lamp or a candle, "not suffering his hand," as Celano says, "to dim the brightness which he regarded as a sign of the Eternal Light."<sup>2</sup> It was possibly due also in a measure to the natural happiness which caused him to regard joy as a definite duty: his whole nature acclaimed the light in any of its forms as its proper heritage. But it would seem to connect further with a feeling that was very strong in him as to the sanctity of all which existed, just because of its existence. He had an intense dislike of destruction, even of things which appeared to have no value, symbolical or otherwise. The very fact that a thing was, invested it in his eyes with a right to continue in existence—with a preciousness that was not apparent to others. On the analogy of his other actions it would seem that outward things stood almost invariably for something else in his mind: they had connotations which, however obscure to the world, were real and vivid enough to him. And it may have been something of this nature which caused him to forbid the erasure of any letter or any syllable when he had letters written. He would not allow anything to be cancelled in the writing, even if it were superfluous or incorrect, as cannot have been infrequent. Of the same nature, but more easy to understand, was his habit of picking up any paper he saw lying about, and putting it in some safe place. His literal reverence for the name of God made him fear lest that name should suffer even unintentional dishonour if it were written on the

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, cxvi, cxvii.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, ii, 165.

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paper which was trodden underfoot, and he therefore rescued it from danger. It may well be that this habit originated during his journey to the Holy Land, and with his usual thoroughness he carried the practice to its logical end. When the writing was obviously pagan, and could not therefore contain the name of God as he knew it, his brethren used to ask him why he took so much care. His answer was that, whatever the writing, it contained the letters of which the most glorious name of God was composed, and also that the good therein belonged neither to the pagans nor to any men, but to God alone.<sup>1</sup>

Such methods as these may seem in a sense too childlike for admiration, and are certainly open to the danger of becoming mere formalisms if they be received as traditions and their original purpose forgotten, but with St. Francis they are the minor evidences, the superficial witnesses, of the spiritual passion which consumed him. Vibrating as he was with the desire for God, the smallest detail of life, the most insignificant events of every day, became tinged with significance. To a mind filled, as was his, with the continual thought of God, nothing could exist which did not bring a message he could interpret in His interest. And, finally, there was nothing else but God.

It has been found possible to see an example of this continual symbolism in St. Francis' attitude towards the poor. The conclusion that as Christ was poor St. Francis therefore regarded every poor man he met as representing Him, is so obvious that perhaps it was inevitable that it should have been accepted. And up to a certain point such a conclusion seems undeniably correct. It would have been virtually impossible for St. Francis to avoid so evident a symbol, and the belief in his adoption of it is confirmed by the early biographies. Thus to a brother

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 82.

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who made some slighting reference to a poor man who came to ask alms, St. Francis commanded that he should not only ask the beggar's forgiveness, but beg also for his prayers. And when the brother had obeyed, St. Francis said to him, "Whenever thou see'st a poor man, brother, a mirror of the Lord and of His poor Mother is set before thee. Likewise in the sick, consider the sicknesses He took on Himself for us."<sup>1</sup> So far it is symbolism, and symbolism on the quite external side. The similarity is in the poverty, but there, it is well to remark, any especial similarity ends. A state of non-possession is in itself no kind of key to the kingdom of heaven. The spiritual state of a poor man, and therefore his similarity to Christ, is a matter for inquiry: the similarity cannot be postulated on the ground of poverty only. The suggestion of some modern biographers is that St. Francis saw Christ in the poor, with the strange implication that he did not see Him, or did not see Him so easily, in the members of other classes. But in truth he knew, and did not merely postulate as a poetical or pious fancy, that Christ was not only in the poor, but in the rich also. It was the result of the burning and ever-growing knowledge of the Christ within himself; the consequence of the union he had effected with Him. By the knowledge of the spirit he was made free of the plane of the spirit, and could recognize its existence, however obscured, in the hiddenness of all men. He realized, that is, that the rich as well as the poor were potentially the conscious dwelling-places of Christ, and it was on this realization that was founded his vital conception of the brotherhood of them all. He saw them as sons who did not yet realize their common father, but as nevertheless linked together in an indissoluble company. His insistence, in fact, was on the underlying reality, in spite of all the

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 85.



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appearances. No discord, no strife, no difficulty could long obscure his vision of this truth.

Such a realization inevitably shapes action—it is not a contributory influence, but an impelling force—and with St. Francis it infused a rare vitality into his action and his teaching. A natural tendency on the part of those who had left the world and its possessions inclined at any rate some of the brethren to look on the worldling with a certain scorn. The very violence of their renunciation led them into the danger of feeling a touch of superiority, and therewith an inclination to division: their profession of poverty was not in itself a safeguard against spiritual pride. But to St. Francis such an attitude became increasingly intolerable. He would exhort them to judge no one, even the most blatantly affluent, and to guard themselves against despising or in any degree looking down on those who lived delicately in the world. His reason was the definite one of their essential unity—"our God is their Lord also"—and, not content with a negative position, he would instruct his companions to reverence the rich as brothers, since they were created by the one Creator, and also in another sense as lords, since they helped the good to work repentance, in providing for their bodily needs.<sup>1</sup> His intense realization of brotherhood was in fact universal, and the sole qualification to be included within it was to exist. He impressed this on his followers again in a later addition to the Primitive Rule, when they had become so established as to have regular places of abode. Friends and foes, thieves and robbers, were to be received with an equal kindness,<sup>2</sup> for St. Francis knew that by insisting on their unity a greater good would be effected than by reproving them for their shortcomings. And he himself put this principle into practice when occasion arose. There was a band of thieves

<sup>1</sup> *Legend*, 58.

<sup>2</sup> First Rule, chap. vii (*Writings*, p. 40).

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at one time in the neighbourhood of the brothers' hermitage at Borgo San Sepolcro, who used to lie in wait in the woods and harass the passers-by. Some of the brethren were of opinion that to give them food was simply to encourage them, but when St. Francis came to the place and his advice was sought, he explained that to treat them on a basis of brotherhood was the one way to win them. He therefore told the brothers to take good bread and wine to the wood where the thieves were hidden, and call them to the feast. When they came the brothers were to spread a cloth on the ground and serve the robbers in all humility and joy, and only when they were finished to ask them to promise first of all to do no physical harm to anyone. The same process was to be repeated on other days: the food was to be given first, and after it the brothers were to reason with the robbers about the futility of living in such misery and doing so much evil. And as a result it is said that the robbers were gradually softened, and began to serve the brothers by carrying wood for them, and that finally some of them became in their turn members of the fraternity.<sup>1</sup>

From this insistence on men's oneness sprang some of the most striking points of St. Francis' character. Besides colouring and shaping his relations with the world it stood as a continually visible ideal which he strove to realize in his surroundings, or as a continual reality which he strove to make apparent. Its implications penetrated into all the details of his life, and urged him on to unceasing efforts towards its actualization. His continual demand and desire was for peace, and besides making that desire the basis of the salutation which he said had been revealed to him by God,<sup>2</sup> he strove to establish peace wherever it was possible. The agreement concluded between the Majores

<sup>1</sup> *Mirror*, lxvi. Cf. *Little Flowers*, xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> See the Will (*Writings*, p. 84). *Legend*, 26; *Bonaventure*, iii, 2.

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and Minores of Assisi in 1210 has been traced by many to his influence,<sup>1</sup> and at the end of his life he put an end to the dispute between the Bishop and the Podestà of Assisi by sending two of the brothers to sing before them the additional verses he had written to the Canticle of the Sun:

“ Be Thou praised, my Lord, of those who pardon for  
Thy love

And endure sickness and tribulations.

Blessed are they who will endure it in peace,

For by Thee, Most High, they shall be crowned.<sup>2</sup>

And between these times he is known to have brought peace to many divided towns, especially to Siena<sup>3</sup> and Arezzo,<sup>4</sup> and to have striven to bring it about at Perugia.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of all his instructions to his followers was finally that of producing and upholding between them a perfect unity, “ to the end that those who had been drawn by the same spirit and begotten by the same father might be peacefully nurtured in the bosom of one mother.”<sup>6</sup> Hence his dislike of the brethren endangering their oneness by an assumption of learning, hence his stern renunciation of property as a medium of division, hence his humility, his obedience, his chastity. Hence his insuperable love of simplicity, as bearing witness to the world of oneness. Hence, also, the extreme violence of his denunciations of slander. He saw in it a vivid example of division, the product of a state which was necessarily the very antithesis of unity, and a certain means of fostering the separateness from which it sprang. He used to speak of it as “ a most hateful plague, an abomination unto the most holy God,

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Joergensen, *St. François*, book ii, chap. iii, p. 145; Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 100; Sabatier, *Vie*, chap. vii, pp. 133-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, ci.

<sup>3</sup> *Little Flowers*, xi.

<sup>4</sup> Bonaventure, vi, 9; Celano, ii, 108.

<sup>5</sup> Celano, ii, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 191.

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forasmuch as the slanderer feedeth on the blood of those souls that he hath slain by the sword of his tongue." He would punish it, therefore, with exceptional severity, and, with a fitting remembrance of its effect in producing division from both man and God, declared that any brother who was guilty of it ought to be unable to lift up his eyes to God until he had done his best to make reparation. "The sin of slanderers is more heinous than that of robbers, inasmuch as the law of Christ—that is fulfilled in the observance of godliness—bindeth us to desire more the salvation of the soul than of the body."<sup>1</sup>

St. Francis' proverbial courtesy would seem to have sprung, in the last analysis, from the same source. The descriptions of his biographers suggest that it was to a large extent natural with him: it was one side of the chivalry to which he had taken so instinctively in the early days. For the tales of knightly adventurers were in part a very school of courtesy, and St. Francis' natural tendency to it would be increased by them and by the whole tradition of the troubadours. But, as with all his natural gifts, he vitalized this, in his later life, by the force and intensity of his spiritual longings. He took it as so much given material, transformed it in the light of his one desire, and applied it to the fulfilment of that desire in himself and his followers. It ceased to be the mere formula of everyday intercourse and became the sign, and to a large extent the product, of a spiritual realization. It was the homage he offered to the inherent nobility of the spirit of man—a reverence due to all as the dwelling-places of God, and due, again, from all who were capable of recognizing such immanence. "Courtesy is own sister to charity," he would say, "and one of the attributes of God,"<sup>2</sup> and discourtesy to his

<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, viii, 4. Cf. Celano, ii, 182, 183, and First Rule, chap. ii (*Writings*, p. 45).

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers*, xxxvii.

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brothers in the spirit was impossible. And his recognition of their oneness was the key to men's sympathies. His attitude to the sinner and the criminal was not "There, but for the grace of God, go I," but "There, in the reality which is God indwelling, go I in very fact and deed." Their sins were in some sense his sins, and their pain his own; in joining himself to the common bond which linked them all in one great brotherhood he shared in their sorrows and their joy. He entered into their lives in a sense which was no longer figurative, for in his union with the Life of them all he became one with their essence. He was, as Celano says, "among the saints, holier than they; among the sinners, like one of themselves."<sup>1</sup> He knew himself for them in God, for he had left the valley of separation and dwelt upon the mountain whence all is seen as one.

But just as in St. Francis' relations with mankind, when all the attributions of symbolism have been exhausted, there remains over something which cannot be accounted for by imagining him to have regarded Christ as symbolized by the poor, so when all the possibilities of symbolism have been exhausted in reference to his attitude towards nature, there remains over something which demands a deeper explanation. And, with nature as with mankind, it was the sacramentalism of the spirit that supplemented and crowned that of the mind.

This deeper sacramentalism, it has been noticed, is the prerogative of those only who are conscious of, and to some extent in, the spirit. It is a mystery of which the final secrets are automatically guarded against profanation. But it is admittedly a side of the union which receives less emphasis at the hands of some mystics than of others, and the suggestion has been put forward that a certain fear of

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 83.



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pantheism may account for the lack of such emphasis in some of the cases. This does not appear, however, to cover the entire ground. It must be conceded that the tendencies of a temperament remain to some extent effective even after the full Union: the structure built up by the inclinations of a lifetime is not finally demolished by the entrance of the spirit into the consciousness. There are natural channels of reception as of expression, and that which is everywhere and at all times will enter by the channels which are naturally most active. The way will have been worn free by a certain use, and the entrance will be effected by whatever way is most open. It will depend inevitably on the conscious direction of attention during normal life, so that although all roads lead to and from the spiritual city, there will be one in particular which will be peculiar to each. It will be that in which he has approached most nearly to a penetration of the surface film, by interest, by enthusiasm, by love. And the expression that he may give to his experience will depend no less surely on the furniture of the mind. The symbols used, the whole attitude and atmosphere, almost the very words themselves—if words be used—will be those with which the normal consciousness is most concerned.

For those who become awake to the God immanent in nature there will have been, therefore, an inevitable preparation, on whatever levels of consciousness it has been accomplished. So much can be postulated from the result, and with St. Francis it is more than borne out by the evidence. He was, in the first place, that kind of poet to whom nature is an unfailing attraction and a ceaseless cause of delight. His continual use of it symbolically suggests the impression it made on him: it can be read between the lines of all his history. He was typically Umbrian in his love of the sun and wide places, and the country round Assisi provided him with an unceasing variety of impres-

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sions. The plain, covered in his time with a dense forest, stretches out below the town to the blue hills of the horizon; the mountain above is bleak and barren and inhospitable; the river valley behind the hill is a place of untouched desolation. Nature in its utmost nakedness lies by the side of nature in its most stupendous fertility; it reflects the heights and the depths of the soul and all the gradations between them. It is a place of sun and laughter, of terror and despair, a place of deep content, but in all its moods and at all its seasons it holds a subtle power of suggestion—a hint that it is not all. It has a glamour, a vitality, a wonder—a quality of sacramentalism that is supreme. And, in the second place, St. Francis' natural attraction towards this surrounding beauty, even before he came to realize its deeper significance, stands out from an incident of his early days. Before he had begun to think seriously of the aim or the meaning of his existence he fell ill, and when he was convalescent went out into the country. "But neither the beauty of the fields, the pleasantness of the vineyards, nor anything that is fair to see could in any wise delight him. Wherefore he wondered *at the sudden change in himself . . .*,"<sup>1</sup> and that moment was the first dim intimation of the greater change that was to come upon him. But the keenness of his disappointment was the measure of his former fondness.

There is recorded, at the end of his life, an event which stands in striking contrast to this. St. Francis was at Rieti, some time after the Stigmatization, while attempts were being made to cure his blindness, and he asked one of the brothers to console him in his pain by playing to him. "The children of this world," he said, "understand not the sacraments of God; and musical instruments appointed of old for God's praise have been converted by men's lust

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 3.

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into means of giving pleasure to their ears.”<sup>1</sup> Such a statement contains the essence of the sacramental attitude. St. Francis realized that if a man's concern were pre-eminently with the outer world of sense, music became merely an entertaining arrangement of sounds; but that for others, and himself among the number, it had a deeper import than could be expressed. There was a reality beneath sound as there was a reality beneath matter; the spirit which gave life and being to the tangible world lay no less surely behind the intangible world, and the key which had opened the one to his comprehension threw open the other also. To him, therefore, music was an expression of the one universal life; it was one aspect of the divine expressing its sweetness to the divine in all places. Music, with all that he saw and felt and heard, had its beginning and its end in God.

But with his notorious dislike of intellectual subtleties it is useless to look for any detailed exposition of St. Francis' most intimate beliefs, either in his own writings, or in those of his biographers. Such a series of declarations as to God as Substance, as is to be found in the Revelations of Lady Julian, unlettered though she were, is quite foreign to him, yet there are nevertheless intimations of the presence of such a doctrine in his mind. On the occasion already referred to when he was distressed at the adulation of the people,<sup>2</sup> he expressed the opinion that the servant of God is but as the wood on which a picture of the Lord and the Blessed Virgin is painted: the honour is to God, and none of it to the man. And the reason adduced was that in respect of God the man is less than the wood and the picture, “nay, he is pure nothing.” The apparent world, that is, is ultimately an unreality; in respect of or in comparison with the world of divinity its solidity is illusory

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 126. Cf. Bonaventure, v, II.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 53.

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and unreal to the point of non-existence, for those who can see below the surface. For the essence of man is of one nature with the essence of the world, and both man and the world have their life and form from it. It underlies and sustains and gives meaning to them all. For if they be nothing in themselves, it is only God as universal Substance which can be their reality.

And St. Francis saw quite clearly this life of reality behind the appearance; it was the link of his amazing brotherhood with all creation. His original love for them helped to lead him to such a vision; his final love and intimate sympathy resulted from it. Celano says vividly of him that "in a surpassing manner, of which other men had no experience, he discerned the hidden things of creation with the eye of the heart, as one who had already escaped into the glorious liberty of the children of God."<sup>1</sup> And Brother Leo with great aptness emphasizes the essential point: "he discerned perfectly the goodness of God not only in his own soul . . . but in every creature."<sup>2</sup> For the discernment in the creature resulted from the discernment in his own soul. Again with remarkable accuracy: "We who were with him used to see him rejoice, within and without, as it were, in all things created; so that touching or seeing them his spirit seemed to be not on earth, but in heaven."<sup>3</sup> For it was literally "in heaven" that he regarded them—from the vantage ground of the spirit. A further passage of Celano describes this sacramentalism of the spirit more fully: "In every piece of workmanship he praised the Craftsman; whatever he found done he referred to the Doer of it. He exulted in all the works of the Lord's hands, and penetrated through those pleasant sights to their life-giving Cause and Principle. In beautiful things he recognized Him who is supremely

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 81.

<sup>2</sup> *Mirror*, cxiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, cxviii.

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beautiful; all good things cried out to him, 'He who made us is the Best.' Everywhere he followed the Beloved by the traces He has impressed on all things: he made for himself of all things a ladder whereby he might reach the Throne."<sup>1</sup>

It is, then, from this consciousness of the creatures' oneness in the plane of spirit, from this penetration to their common source of life, that sprang the close sympathy and love with and for them all that has come to be the best known side of St. Francis' character. When he composed the Praises of the Creatures, the immortal Canticle of Brother Sun, in a moment of spiritual exaltation at San Damiano, he spoke from knowledge, and not at the promptings of a tender poetical fancy. The sun was to him obviously his brother and the moon his sister, he recognized his actual kinship with his brother the wind and his sister the water, with his brother the fire and his sister and mother the earth, and finally, with great gratitude and exultation, with his tender sister death. They were he and he was they, for all were God. Small wonder, then, if the biographies are filled with anecdotes in illustration of his kindness and his care towards every kind of beast; the surprise would be if they were absent. They stand in a different class from such as record the objects of his symbolic reverence; they are at once more human and more vital. It is, moreover, as inevitable that the animals should feel a trust and a confidence on their side, since the instinct by which they were prompted would seem to be nearer the source of life than is the power of reasoning. It makes up in sureness what it lacks in self-consciousness.

To him who would pick the worms out of the road so that they might not be trodden on, who would provide

<sup>1</sup> Celano, ii, 165; Bonaventure, ix, 1. See also Bonaventure, viii, 6, where St. Francis is spoken of as hailing the animals as brothers "forasmuch as he recognized in them the same origin as in himself."



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honey and the choicest wine for the bees so that they might not starve in the winter,<sup>1</sup> who would buy turtle doves from a passer-by intent on taking them to the market<sup>2</sup>—to him all the animals responded. The cicala would come and perch on his hand when he was at the Portiuncula, and he would exhort it to join its praises with his. "Sing, my sister cicala, and praise the Lord thy Creator with a joyful song."<sup>3</sup> A leveret which had been caught in a trap was brought to him by one of the brothers, and on being released, ran to St. Francis and hid in the folds of his habit. It returned again and again after being taken away, and a rabbit once showed equal confidence on the island in Lake Trasimene.<sup>4</sup> He would put the fish back into the water if any were offered to him, calling them by the name of brother,<sup>5</sup> and on one occasion when a pheasant was sent to him to eat, he took it gratefully, saying: "Praised be our Creator, brother pheasant." He then told the brothers to take it some distance away, to see whether it would rather be free or return to him, but they found that however often they took it away it came back continually to St. Francis, "almost forcing its way under the tunics of the brethren who were at the door."<sup>6</sup> And if these things be credible, as surely they are without any effort of faith, is the famous story of the wolf of Gubbio any less credible?<sup>7</sup> The difference between gaining the confidence of a leveret and succeeding in subduing the rapacity of a wolf is one of degree only, and not of kind, and it suggests an exaggerated timidity to insist, as has been done frequently, that the story

<sup>1</sup> Celano, i, 80; ii, 165.

<sup>2</sup> *Little Flowers*, xxii.

<sup>3</sup> Celano, ii, 171; Bonaventure, viii, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Celano, i, 60; Bonaventure, viii, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Celano, i, 61; Bonaventure, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Celano, ii, 170; Bonaventure, viii, 10.

<sup>7</sup> It is given in all its quaint beauty in chap. xxi of the *Little Flowers*.

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is a legend embodying the tale of a peace concluded between St. Francis and a rapacious nobleman.<sup>1</sup>

The same consciousness of brotherhood lay beneath his no less famous sermons to the creatures. It was not, surely, despair of humanity which drove him to preaching to the animals, nor a pathetic and fantastic belief that they were in need of spiritual exhortation, but the result of his knowledge of their reality. It was a spontaneous outburst of praise and gladness, which so filled all his consciousness that he cried out to the very flowers and beasts of the fields to join their praises to his. He knew the life with which they pulsed and thrilled, and knew that it was of God, and he directed, as it were, their gratitude through the medium of his own consciousness. So, when he was walking through the country and came upon great masses of flowers, he would talk to them and invite them to praise God, and there was no kind of thing created that he felt to be without the power to do this. The cornfields and the vineyards, the trees and the grasses of the fields, the stones and the waters of the rivers, his dear brother fire and the very earth, the air, the wind, and the sky—he would have them all join in the universal chorus of praise.<sup>2</sup> And what he said on such occasions may be gathered in substance, though probably not in accurate detail, from the traditional sermon to the birds. “My sisters the birds, much are ye beholden unto God your creator, and alway

<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., Joergensen, *St. François*, book ii, chap. iii, p. 147. Le Monnier, *Histoire de St. François*, vol. ii, p. 303, regards the incident as unauthentic; Dr. A. Bournet, *St. François d'Assise, Etude sociale et médicale*, Lyon, 1893, p. 78, is of opinion that it symbolizes the pacifying influence of St. Francis on the society of his time. So, also, with great ingenuity, Tamassia, *S. Francesco d'Assisi e la sua Leggenda*, pp. 203-12. For a detailed discussion of the probabilities see *Il Lupo di Gubbio*, by P. Bartolomasi, Min. Conv., in *Miscellanea Francescana*, vol. x, fasc. ii, Foligno, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> Celano, i, 81.

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and in every place ought ye to praise Him, because He hath given you liberty to fly wheresoever ye will, and hath clothed you on with twofold and threefold raiment. Moreover, He preserved your seed in the ark of Noah that your race might not be destroyed. Again, ye are beholden unto Him for the element of the air which He hath appointed for you; furthermore, ye sow not neither do ye reap; yet God feedeth you and giveth you rivers and fountains wherefrom to drink; He giveth you mountains and valleys for your refuge, and high trees wherein to build your nests; and, in that ye know not how to sew nor spin, God clotheth you and your little ones; wherefore doth your Creator love you seeing that He giveth you so many benefits. Guard yourselves, therefore, my sisters the birds, from the sin of ingratitude and be ye ever mindful to give praise to God."<sup>1</sup>

This is the note of the beginning, the continuation, and the end of the life of St. Francis the mystic. It is the call of one who has found God in the Centre of his soul, hailing that God in all things and unceasingly proclaiming His praise.

<sup>1</sup> *Little Flowers*, xvi. Cf. Celano, i, 58; Bonaventure, xii, 3.



## *Appendix*

### ST. FRANCIS AND THE NECESSITY OF PENANCE.

(*See page 106*)

THE Catholic position that St. Francis did not disregard penance is based on four points:

1. Because of the inherent impossibility of a difference of view between a saint and the Church that has canonized him.

2. That St. Francis distinguished between mortal and venial sins, and followed the example of Christ in His treatment of the woman taken in adultery, in respect of venial sins only.

3. That those who are to have no power of enjoining any other penance save "Go and sin no more" are the brothers not in orders, and not the priests.

4. That a reference to penance occurs in both the First and Second Rules.

As regards the first point enough has been said in the text in respect of both St. Francis and St. Teresa, to show that the language and conduct of canonized saints sometimes runs strikingly counter to the Church. Such seems simply to be the fact, and it is difficult to see what good may be expected to arise from its denial.

On the second point, it is clear that a distinction between

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mortal and venial sins did exist in St. Francis' mind. So much is made clear by his treatment of them separately in the letter under question, but there is nothing to show that he intended to limit his instruction as to penance to those who had committed venial sins only.<sup>1</sup> His appreciation of the greater gravity of mortal sin is shown by the care with which he arranges for the treatment of a brother who had committed such a sin, but there is no mention of penance in his case. The Catholic comment on such an omission is that nothing was said about it "because confession and penance would follow as a matter of course,"<sup>2</sup> but it is scarcely conceivable that when St. Francis was especially concerned to express his views on the course to be followed in regard to the treatment of sin, he should leave anything open to question, and more especially anything of such vital moment as penance. It would seem more reasonable and more in accordance with the evidence of the letter as it stands, to suppose that St. Francis expounded his view of the treatment to be meted out to those who had committed mortal and venial sins, separately as regards the immediate action to be taken, and finally summed up the question of penance (which would be the ultimate question in any such case) for both kinds of sin. The mortal sin is to be reported and the sinner sent to the custos, the venial sin is to be confessed to the nearest priest, or failing that, to any brother; so far St. Francis legislates differently for the two cases; but he clinches the whole matter of the final treatment in either case by forbidding any other penance than "Go and sin no more."

As to those to whom the instruction to say these words to the sinner was addressed, the Latin version is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> That he did so is suggested by, e.g., M. Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. xii, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup> M. Carmichael, *The Writings of St. Francis*, in *The Month*, February, 1904, p. 163.



## Appendix

“ Et si in alio peccato veniali ceciderit confiteatur fratri suo sacerdoti, et si non fuerit ibi sacerdos confiteatur fratri suo donec habebit sacerdotem qui eum absolvat canonice sicut dictum est. Et isti penitus non habeant potestatem injungendi aliam paenitentiam nisi istam: ‘ Vade et amplius noli peccare.’ ”<sup>1</sup> As it stands, there is nothing in this passage to decide who are the “ isti ” who shall have no further powers of inflicting penance, but it is a perfectly reasonable supposition that the word refers to the persons who have been last mentioned. These are the priests, and the whole last sentence, from “ Et isti ” down to “ peccare ” appears to stand in some degree as a qualification of “ canonice.” There would have been no reason to insert such a word if confession and penance were to follow in the ordinary course, and its presence suggests that St. Francis’ intention was that the procedure was to be canonical, with the qualification as to penance which follows. Mr. Carmichael, however, complains that M. Sabatier has taken the words in just this sense: “ too ready to believe in the impossible phenomenon of a St. Francis in hostility to his mother the Church ” he “ has inferred, even with the full text of the letter before him, that the ‘ isti ’ are the superiors of the Order and its priests.”<sup>2</sup> Mr. Carmichael’s own view is that the “ isti ” refers to the brothers who are not in orders, and that it is they therefore who have no power to enjoin penance. But there is no evidence to show that the fantastic conception of one brother enjoining penance on another ever entered into St. Francis’ mind. It is so directly in opposition to the whole of the Franciscan spirit that it is difficult to take the suggestion seriously. But this objection apart, Mr. Carmichael suggests that one of the reasons for the omission of any reference to confession, in the first paragraph of the English version that has been

<sup>1</sup> Bartholdus, *Traçt. de indulgentia*, ed. Sabatier, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> M. Carmichael, *loc. cit.*

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quoted in the text, is that both guardian and custos were often enough not priests. If this were so, if the fact of not being a priest were sufficient to make St. Francis omit any reference to confession of a mortal sin to such a person, the feeling would surely have been strong enough to make it impossible for the idea of explicitly forbidding them to enjoin penance for venial sin, to have entered his mind. The supposition seems less irrational, that St. Francis limited confession to an ordinary brother to cases of venial sin, and forbade penance for either kind of sin.

The fact that references to penance occur in both the First and Second Rules is mentioned by the same writer. There does not seem any possibility of Chapter 20 of the First Rule (where the reference occurs) having formed part of the Primitive Rule,<sup>1</sup> but there are no means of judging its exact date. It takes the form of a recommendation to the brethren to receive penance and absolution from the priests in the knowledge that they will be absolved if they observe faithfully the penance enjoined them.<sup>2</sup> Granting its genuineness (which there is no reason to doubt) there is ample time between any date that can be assigned to it within the bounds of probability, and the probable date of the letter, which is put at 1223,<sup>3</sup> for a change of mind on the part of St. Francis. It is not possible to tie him down to a view expressed at one time, when at a later and maturer moment of his life he appears to have discarded it. It might be replied that the injunction of penance in the Rule of 1223 was an example of a yet maturer view, by a few months, but there does not appear to be any possibility of that Rule representing St. Francis' own ideals. Biographers both Catholic and non-Catholic agree on this, and one of the former permits himself to say that it is almost horrifying to see how little there is in it of what St. Francis

<sup>1</sup> See Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 402.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> *Writings*, p. 53.

## Appendix

would have wished.<sup>1</sup> To claim the dry and essentially businesslike insistence on penance which is found in Chapter 7 as evidence of either the wish or the spirit of St. Francis is therefore of no avail.

<sup>1</sup> Joergensen, *St. François*, book iii, chap. xii, p. 376. Cf. Cuthbert, *Life*, p. 322; Sabatier, *Vie*, chap. xv, and Bartholi, *Collection de Documents, etc.*, p. 128, where he says: "It is sufficient to read the Rule of 1223 to see that though the vague formulas about mercy have been retained, the precise injunction which should have been one of the characteristics of the Franciscan Order, has been prudently left aside." See also Dr. Lempp, *Frère Elie de Cortone*, p. 51, who regards the Rule of 1223 as the result of a compromise.





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